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ARLIN TURNER

Duke University

The Many Sides Of Southern Humor

In the twenty years before the Civil War Southern humor reached its highest peak before Mark Twain. Several authors published works of major importance both in the quality of the humor and in the revelation of the society which produced them. Although these works were not considered literature in their time and found little room in the literary reviews and plantation libraries, we have learned recently that many of the humorous pieces which appeared anonymously in the newspapers and magazines and were later, many of them, collected into books, were written by lawyers, judges, governors, college presidents, and even preachers. We have learned further that in one form or another humor was pervasive and the humorous writings were read and enjoyed widely except in the higher social strata, where the necessity to maintain class and caste required the gentlemen to keep sober faces, whether among themselves or before members of other ranks.

Thus it has become clear that Southern humor in the ante-bellum period and other periods as well merits study from several angles. Accordingly a program of the Southeastern American Studies Association, meeting jointly with the South Atlantic Modern Language Association at Chattanooga on November 30, 1957, was planned to include papers which would discuss Southern humor from several different approaches. The first four of the five papers brought together in this issue of the *Mississippi Quarterly* were read on that occasion.

In the first of these papers an analyst and historian of social phenomena finds the humor to be an important vehicle of social evaluation. The humorist, whether Augustus Baldwin Longstreet in the 1830's or William Faulkner and Eudora Welty a century later, employs his particular means to assess the elements in his society, and in turn provides the social historian with revealing source material. In the

second paper, a student of critical theories explores the intentions of the ante-bellum humorists and discovers that they were thoughtfully aware of reality and fantasy as complementary elements in their works, literal and imaginative recording of the life around them, and the fusion of literary and folk materials. Writing as a literary historian under the title "Suggs and Sut in Modern Dress," the author of the third paper demonstrates that in presenting the Southern scene and Southern characters writers in the generation of Truman Capote and Flannery O'Connor employ materials today with the same outlandish and nightmarish qualities which set the tone for the episodes narrated about Simon Suggs and Sut Lovingood before the Civil War. Whether those qualities are particularly Southern or not, they appear in much of the characteristic humor of the region. There is evidence that the early humorists were led to extremes in crudeness and indelicacy as a way of protesting against the false refinement which was dominant in polite letters of the time.

A historian in the fourth paper finds humor distinctly absent from public life in the South and generally unwelcome among the upper classes except when focused on the Negroes or lower-class whites. The presence of humor in one quarter and the absence in another he believes significant in an interpretation of Southern history. In the final paper a folklorist shows how the tall-tales, particularly those dealing with animals and other phenomena of the natural world, grew plausibly into the records of actual affairs; and he thus suggests that in origin the humor was indigenous and in a measure unconscious.

Although Southern humor has won a place of such respect alongside other literary work of the region that it is unlikely to lose that place, it has many sides, and as a consequence legitimate claims are laid on it also by the sociologist, the historian, and the folklorist.

JOHN M. MACLACHLAN

University of Florida

Southern Humor As A Vehicle of Social Evaluation

Tragedy and humor, different as they may be, share some important qualities. Both depend upon emotion to make their points, and both reach towards the essences of human behavior. Tragedy at its highest evokes the very *ethos* of the culture from which it comes, and affirms universal principles through its actors. Humor, perhaps, deals with these ultimates indirectly, but at last is concerned to present its own whole view of man.

The two are alike again in using similar vehicles of representation. To the extent that they concern themselves with cultural realities, they make the same choice from among the three representational possibilities, the type, the archetype and the stereotype. The merely *typical*, being by definition commonplace, must give way to the archetypal for the purposes of creative expression. The difference between the two is that typicality represents the most common or general phenomenon, the archetypal the most meaningful. At its worst, of course, which is to say in artistic failure, the archetype becomes a stereotype, an oversimplified misrepresentation. Even in the *genre* tradition, as in the best naturalistic writing, the commonplace is converted into the archetype, if either tragedy or humor is to be achieved.

Thus both tragedy and humor become analogous, in a sense, with the schools of painting such as impressionism, post-impressionism, and their successors, in that the effort is to present a sense of being under treatment rather than a photograph of reality, to get to meanings at the expense of detail. The essential difference between tragedy and humor, then, lies in the fact that the latter is by preference indirect, depending upon inference drawn from its implications to make its point, generally succeeding best when it is most subtle. Tragedy meanwhile

Professor MacLachlan died in September, 1960.

goes straight to the point, affirms with a strong impact, and leaves the subtleties to take care of themselves. It is certainly in part for this reason that the tragedian is generally regarded as profound and the humorist as superficial, when in actuality they may be on the same level of insight and expression. A contributory factor is that because of its indirection humor runs the risk of speaking with a delphic voice, of saying one thing to one man and another to another.

Still another reason for a general underrating of humor and the humorist is that the universal is more easily seen through the particular case when it is presented as man's tragedy. Humor's tendency towards topicality hides its universals. Indeed, universals in humor are hard to identify, and cross-culturally one lone rule seems to hold, and that a negative one: no culture among the 250 covered by Murdock in his *Social Structure* possesses as a norm a "joking relationship" between husband and mother-in-law. Otherwise, cultures range from those of some of the Amerindians in which ribaldry was the common order of the day to others in which humor seems to be almost non-existent, and no single interrelation of human beings, act, or experience equally "funny" throughout the world.

This preface is made to offer the idea that humor may be seen as a mirror of man, that the humorist provides implicitly what the "serious" artist provides explicitly, and that the essential judgements of the one find in the other an equally inevitable expression despite the differences in the mode of delivery.

Humor and Cultural Evaluation

When a specific culture is in point, the implicit judgement of the humorist may vary from wholehearted acceptance to downright animosity. The latter, explicit in ridicule or acrid wit, cannot be expressed adequately by the gentler forms of humor. However, to a member of the culture group who is on the defensive, any kind of humorous reference may seem to be antagonistic, arousing enmity and misunderstanding.

A current extreme instance is the movement which has virtually driven the Negro as a comic character from the printed page, television and radio, and the motion picture. A recent broadcast of an Uncle Remus story over a national television hookup told how *Mister Bear* lost his tail — at, of course, the hands of *Mister Rabbit*. Here Uncle Remus, a genuine and genuinely sympathetic archetype if ever there has been one, is seen as a caricature aimed at racial domination.

How mistaken may be this tendency appears in the history of archetypes, or perhaps stereotypes, with reference to some other culture groups in American life. The first stereotype of the Irishman in North

America, "Paddy," was seen as a drunken, violent papist, bent on the destruction of all that is good in American life. Whipping boy of the Know Nothings and the Nativists, this figure served a generation of ethnocentric extremists. With the passage of time, however, a subtle change came about. The same attributes — irrationality, inebriety and the like — became the stock in trade of the Irish comedian. Made ridiculous, Paddy became ludicrous, then humorous, and finally, as Pat and Mike — and as a battalion of enormously successful comedians — one of the most effective inter-cultural diplomats in history.

In a like manner the first American stereotype of the Jew was Shylock, the blood-lusting parasite of the Middle Ages. But again, in time, the same traits — here greed, egotism, obliviousness to the rights of others — began to yield to comic treatment and the same process worked out. It is of course to be noted that, just as the great Irish comedians were indeed Irishmen, great Jewish comedians have been Jews and hence guarded against the attributing to them of a desire to degrade their own peoples.

Defensive-minded southerners, too, have seen in humorous treatments of their kind unintended animosity, and have repeatedly misinterpreted the intentions of the humorist. Each of the writers who will be mentioned later has been the target of such resentment, and in each instance there seems, to the detached onlooker, to be an error of interpretation. The popular nonsouthern stereotype of the southerner, like the two others already dealt with, appears to have gone through a similar evolution, this time, in effect, from Simon Legree to Senator Claghorn, the mountaineers of *Esquire* magazine, and the Kentucky Colonel.

The Evolution of Southern Humor

The genesis of southern humor, or humorous writing about the South, appears to be in the work of Gus Longstreet, whose Ransy Sniffle, Parrington reports, was converted by Clemens into Huck Finn. Clemens' own works during the middle years of his life, *Tom Sawyer*, *Life on the Mississippi* and *Huckleberry Finn*, partake more of the western South than of the West *in proprio*. Much of the work of James Lane Allen is pervaded by a gentle but keen humor, shot through with sociological insights. Allen has had little influence in recent decades, however, since the genteel tradition in which he wrote is not in key with modern realism.

An interstitial period in the late years of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth produced Irvin S. Cobb, E. K. Means, Harris Dickson and Octavus Roy Cohen. Their picture of life in the region was an amiable one, with little rancor and no violence within or between the races. To them the archetype of the southern Negro was the friendly servant, patient, faithful, amusing in fine for

his simplicity and his childlike virtues. Only in Cohen's Florian Slap-
pey, who makes a career of fleecing the members of *The Sons and Daugh-
ters of I Will Arise*, do middle class traits — and weaknesses — appear in
the Negro. Meanwhile, their archetype of the white southerner becomes
Judge Priest, kindly paternalistic and patriarchal.

With the rise of the modern strain toward realism and naturalism
the southern writer has gone back to the Longstreet tradition in his
humor. In three writers of what might be called serious humor — to
distinguish it from the work of writers who make no attempt to provide
depth of insight — are all of the elements of the contemporary trend.
These are Faulkner, Caldwell and Eudora Welty. Faulkner's *The Ham-
let* and *As I Lay Dying* represent his treatment; Welty's *The Ponder
Heart*, "Why I Live at the P. O.," and "The Petrified Man" hers; and
Caldwell's *Journeyman, Tobacco Road* and *Tragic Ground* his view-
point and method. These three are chosen because they represent three
distinct approaches and kinds of insight.

The episode of the Texas horses in Faulkner's *The Hamlet* has a
wild, almost zany, surface, but the implications beneath are strong. Here
is a gullibility which is not merely rustic, but Redneck, a stubbornness
not merely male but also southern, and a disregard for consequences
worthy of hillbillies anywhere. Here too is the ubiquitous Flem Snopes,
as always victimizing his neighbors — but this time with hilarious con-
sequences. The author's whole assessment of Redneck culture, which
would be called "Cracker" in the more easterly South, is so thoroughly im-
plicit as to be almost explicit.

As I Lay Dying works another vein in the same culture, with serio-
comic results. The vicissitudes met by the family, as they trek from Ala-
bama back to eastern Mississippi to bury a corpse which insists on
spoiling, evoke the whole range of relationships in what the anthropolo-
gist would call the nuclear family of this culture group, and therefore
the essences of the culture itself. Read as cultural reporting, the volume
shows a profound insight, and provides one for the reader, into a people
the author has studied at first hand throughout his life.

It should be interjected here that critics who say that neither of
these pictures is "typical" are perfectly correct. The question is whether
they are archetypal in the creative sense, or mere stereotypes reduced
to the simplicity of caricature. The answer would appear to lie in the
fact that Faulkner never shows disrespect or disregard for a character. No
matter what meanness or fatuity one of them demonstrates he is still pre-
sented as a whole product of his time and place, and is offered to the
reader without visible prejudice.

Eudora Welty's short story "Why I Live at the P. O." may be read simply as the report of a neurotic female, but her assiduous pursuit of the nuances and subtleties of southern feminine culture shows through at a score of points, as it does in "The Petrified Man." The South as seen through her eyes in her humorous works is essentially a region of small town or city folk, peopled largely by women who are occasionally bedevilled by men or children. In *The Ponder Heart* she enlarges her view to encompass the whole of a small town, and to put into the record some of the inchoate tendencies of that culture group. In everything except, perhaps, the money-tossing climax of the courtroom scene, the piece may be regarded as faithful reporting, a *genre* reduction of the common-places to archetypical statement.

Ersine Caldwell's *Tragic Ground* gives the reader an archetype of the frustration and bewilderment of the lower class rural southerner caught up in the maelstrom of modern life. The inability of the central figure to comprehend either the complexities of an industrial job or the practices of modern social welfare provides a series of events familiar to anyone who has had experience in the administration of public welfare programs. In this work, for the first time in Caldwell's writings, a background of the "normal" southern community furnishes explicit contrast for his archetype. Lack of such counterpoint is probably responsible in large measure for the extent of resentment expressed towards such works as *Tobacco Road* and *Journeyman*. *Tobacco Road* as a play and a motion picture reduced Jeeter's family to a collection of much oversimplified stereotypes, but in the novel the "poor white" of the southern rural slum is recognizable, and has enough depth of characterization to deserve consideration as an archetype. The evangelist of *Journeyman* may be considered as little more than a caricature, but a generation ago the rural South had its share of such charlatans. More to the point, his character is in the category of *reductio ad finem* of the "brush arbor" preacher's wayfaring life.

Altogether, the unsophisticated reader who reads modern humor as produced by these and other writers may commit the error of thinking their purpose is to present the typical in southern life. Doing so, he may conclude that the South is peopled largely by idiots and morons, neurotics and scoundrels, hypocrites and aimless nonentities. In the conclusion he will have missed the point of the matter and the method of the writers. The emptiness of the life of the little people, the poverty, the ignorance of the larger world and its culture, are instead seen as the failure-aspects of a society which has failed to attain perfection.

While it is not possible to document by page and line, it appears that each of the three authors proceeds from a different premise as to the reasons underlying that failure. In Faulkner's case the unhorsing of

the aristocrat and his replacement in power by the prospering Redneck who has not yet achieved social conscience or understanding, in Welty's the simple fact of cultural isolation, and in Caldwell's the implied theme of class exploitation, seem to be the mainsprings, the major implied criticisms. Be this as it may, and however risible some passages may be, none of the writers appears anywhere to laugh at or with his subjects. Instead, in the guise of a knowing reporter, he smiles, albeit sadly, for them.

EDD WINFIELD PARKS

University of Georgia

The Intent Of The Ante-Bellum Southern Humorists

There is abundant justification for describing the work of the Southern humorists as "spontaneous, hilarious pencillings." No doubt most of these widely scattered, highly varied writers simply sat down and described a realistic incident or concocted a tall tale, with no particular concern about why they were writing as they did. But a few men felt the need for a rough-and-ready aesthetic that would justify a new way of writing.

Some men never doubted either its originality or its validity. By 1845 William T. Porter was convinced that his weekly *Spirit of the Times* had become "the nucleus of a new order of literary talent. . . who have subsequently distinguished themselves in this novel and original walk of literature." His associate editor, George Wilkes, later noted accurately that Porter had "brought out a new class of writers, and created a style which may be denominated as American literature—not the august, stale, didactic, pompous, bloodless method of the magazine pages of that day; but a fresh, crisp, vigorous, elastic, graphic literature, full of force, readiness, actuality and point."

Although the humorous sketch and the tall tale found a congenial home in the *Spirit*, Porter rightly puts the greatest emphasis on realistic stories, sketches, and essays. In fact, the tall tales began as an exaggeration of reality, as James K. Paulding indicated when he described his purpose in the rip-roaring *Lion of the West* (1830) as "to embody certain peculiar characteristics of the west in one single person, who should thus represent, not an individual, but the species." Some falsification naturally ensued, but the best of them have a semi-epic quality and flavor: Constance Rourke sees in Mike Fink "a Mississippi river-god, one of those minor deities whom men create in their own image and magnify to magnify themselves," and in the legendary Davy Crockett

a figure closely allied to mythology. The contemporary novelist John Neal was most impressed by their zestfulness: "live stories I should call them," and always "brimful of energy and vivacity."

Crockett himself enjoyed at times stretching the long bow to its fullest extent, but in the Preface to his autobiographical narrative he (and possibly also his collaborator) roundly declared that "I have endeavored to give the reader a plain, honest, homespun account of my state in life," and he protests valiantly against the "bundle of ridiculous stuff" incorporated into the *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett* (1833). Although acknowledging help in his own book's preparation, he concludes with the advice: "just read for yourself, and my ears for a heel tap, if before you get through you don't say, with many a good-natured smile and hearty laugh, 'This is truly the very thing itself—the exact image of its Author.'"

They may be equally honest, but there is certainly nothing plain or homespun about such full-dress biographies as Wirt's life of Patrick Henry, or John P. Kennedy's life of William Wirt. Crockett was presenting in embryo a case for realism in biography; if he did not go very far, he at least made a beginning.

More important are the ideas of the creative writers. The best of them emphasized realism, but they recognized that a literal truthfulness was not enough. Realism must be heightened and enhanced by imagination and by art.

Augustus Baldwin Longstreet recognized the necessity for fusing these into a unified whole. His friend and fellow-humorist William Tappan Thompson quotes him as desiring that through *Georgia Scenes* "we may be seen and heard by our posterity two hundred years hence just as we were." Fidelity came first, but obviously any book that was to last for two centuries must "enliven the family fireside" of a contemporary, and the author "used some little art to recommend them to the reader of my own times" because "the chance of their surviving the author would be increased in proportion to their popularity upon their first appearance." Artistry could help but it must not be allowed to distort authenticity: the sketches "consist of nothing more than fanciful combination of real incidents and characters," he writes, but he quickly qualifies even this statement by adding that he had used "some personal incident or adventure of my own, real or imaginary, as it would best suit my purpose."

He objected vigorously when the design of the book was "misapprehended" as mere "entertainment." His characters, episodes, descriptions, and dialect were drawn directly from the immediate life around him, and the "aim of the author was to supply a chasm in history which has always been overlooked—the manners, customs, amuse-

ments, wit, dialect, as they appear in all grades of society to an eye and ear witness of them . . . I have not confined myself to strictly veracious historic detail; but there is scarcely one word from the beginning to the end of the book which is not strictly *Georgian*." With some justice Longstreet was praised by his contemporaries both for the skill of his artistry and for his exact fidelity.

At times Longstreet's desire for a documentary accuracy effectively though perhaps inadvertently buttressed his artistry. After using "d-n," the author apologizes: "I should certainly omit such expressions as this could I do so with historic fidelity; but the peculiarities of the times of which I am writing cannot be faithfully represented without them. In recording these things, *as they are*, truth requires me . . ." Truth and candor constrained him to record various crimes and follies that reflected no honor on his countrymen, but these too were a necessary part of the total picture.

Longstreet was a limited artist. He disagreed, sermonized, and moralized all too freely, no doubt with the feeling that his essay-intrusions helped to justify the writing of fiction. But the Addisonian echoes in his work are precisely the qualities in them that we value least. Fortunately it was also the part his contemporaries valued least. He was at his best when he portrayed live and living persons he had known, talking as he had heard them talk, and moving about in a region whose geography and customs he knew at first-hand. Then he fully earned Poe's judgement that he was "imbued with a spirit of the truest humor, and endowed moreover with an exquisitely discriminating and penetrative understanding of character in general, and of Southern character in particular."

Although suspecting that the Americans, like the English, were not a humorous people, William Gilmore Simms thought that an indigenous humor had developed on the Southern frontier. He was less inclined to emphasize the strictly realistic elements than Longstreet, and he thought the published specimens rather pale and weak in comparison to the oral versions which he had heard, but "in the buoyant life and animation of its speech,—in its copious fund of expression,—in the audacity of its illustration,—its very hyperbole,—the singular force of its analogies,—the pregnant, though ludicrous vitality of its pictures,—its queer allusions, sudden repartee, and lively adaptation of the foreign and unexpected to the familiar,—we recognize the presence of a genius as likely to embody the humorous as the eloquent." This was a "rare, racy, articulate, native humor," which Simms himself sometimes effectively employed in episodes and in stories although it was incidental to his main purpose; of the published books of humor he thought *Georgia Scenes* "unquestionably, far beyond any comparison . . . the best specimens in this field that the American genius has produced."

William Tappan Thompson, like Longstreet, put the emphasis on particular characters in a particular place. True, when he wrote under the fictional guise of Major Jones, his prefatory comments employ the trappings of the professional humorist: if the letters in the *Courtship*, he tells the reader, "will serve to draw a few nails out of your coffin, by makin you laugh, they will serve a equally benevolent purpose by puttin a few dollars in the pocket" of Joseph Jones. The determinedly humorous approach, though with a different intent, is continued by the imaginary Major when he writes that his *Sketches of Travel* "was rit with no higher aim than to amuse the idle hours of my friends, and if it fails to do that, its a spilt job." But when Thompson writes under his own name and voices his own intentions and convictions, he states explicitly that his attempt is to "depict some of the peculiar features of the Georgia backwoodsmen . . . to present to the public a few more interesting specimens of the genus Cracker."

Unlike such tall tale writers as George Washington Harris and even more unlike the somewhat later professional humorists, Thompson never used dialect merely for humorous effect. His purpose, rather, was the realistic one of making the language and pronunciation of his characters consistent with that of the Middle Georgia farmer: "For this purpose the local dialect or patois peculiar to the rural district of Georgia was employed, with the orthography necessary to convey the peculiar pronunciation of the word. Consistency, and not an effort at cheap wit, compelled the resort not only to incorrect grammar, but also to a mode of spelling many words, more simply than is found in our standard lexicons." He firmly believed that the "mangling and murdering of etymology is no part of humor," and he confined himself in that respect to such malapropisms as *transgression* for *digression*.

Thompson protests with quite evident sincerity that he liked, respected, and even admired these people, but that he enjoyed their oddities and peculiarities. He could see that both their happiness and their usefulness might well be improved by the standardizing influences of education, but the result also would be, regrettably, that individualities would be absorbed into a mass uniformity: such education would "by polishing away those peculiarities which now mark his manners and language, reduce him to the common level of commonplace people, and make him less a curious 'specimen' for the study of the naturalist. As he now is, however, I have endeavoured, in a small way, to catch his 'manners living as they rise.'"

Here Thompson significantly extends the aesthetic that Longstreet at least hinted at. He recognizes that it is the original, not the typical, that forms the proper basis for art, just as in his review of Long-

street's *Georgia Scenes* he recognized that Ned Brace and Ransey Sniffles were sublimations and not mere descriptions, were in fact imaginative creations based on reality. Along with this recognition there is also a definite limitation: Thompson, like Longstreet, believed that if the author could find strikingly typical incidents and, in the old sense of the word, original people, he would be well advised to stick closely to actuality. It seems never to have occurred to them that, although real life might provide an adequate foundation for sketch or story, too much reliance on observation and too little employment of the imagination might ultimately prove a handicap.

Whether or not it turned out to be a handicap or a benefit, the Southern humorists tied their work closely to the life around them. Joseph G. Baldwin, more a social historian than a creative writer, announced his purpose clearly: The *Flush Times*, he wrote, was intended "to illustrate the periods, the characters, and the phases of society" of frontier life in Alabama and Mississippi. By contrast, Johnson Hooper's *Simon Suggs* is fiction closely tied to fact. To increase the semblance of verisimilitude, Hooper adopts the mellow device of the mock or satirical biography and assures the reader that he has no doubt of the "perfect genuineness" of the story; although, perhaps as a warning to the reader not to carry a belief in the author's truthfulness too far, he quickly adds that it is to be a campaign biography.

Richard Malcolm Johnston has summed up the intent of the humorists in a specific remark on his own work and in a brief general commentary. He was so dependent on a specific locale that he confessed, "As long as my people have no fixed surroundings, they are nowhere to me; I cannot get along with them at all." Even more significant is his belief that "an artist can create interesting concretes only if he can re-enact scenes from human life." Successful story-telling, oral or written, required artistry, but it should be so concealed that the listener or reader would be conscious only of the "naturalness" of the story. A writer could achieve this only by re-creating life as he had personally known it, directly and intimately, as a child and as a man. Of one collection he notes that "While these sketches, like their predecessors, are imaginary, except as to the scenes and certain characteristics which have been selected here and there, they are in harmony with the rural society which the author remembers as a lad, and later as a young lawyer." So Johnston defined his purpose as "to illustrate some phases of old-time rural life in middle Georgia," and he acknowledged freely that he took as his artistic models the story-tellers he had known in his youth.

There were, of course, literary influences on practically all of the humorists. Simon Suggs, as Thackeray recognized, fits naturally in the tradition of literary rogues. It is not by accident that *Georgia Scenes* "forcibly" reminded Poe of the Spectator, or that some of Johnston's

work reminds us of Dickens. But they were not slavish imitators. When the humorist and editor George W. Bagby had read too many ultra-literary but derivative poems submitted to him, he adjured American poets to "kick Tennyson and all other models into the middle of next week . . . and come right down to the soil that gave them birth." No such advice was needed by the humorists. They stayed close to the soil. If their home-grown literature was often crude, it reflected directly the life they had known.

WILLARD THORP

Princeton University

Suggs and Sut In Modern Dress: The Latest Chapter In Southern Humor

Three summers ago I was working on a chapter about the renaissance of writing in the South during the past thirty years. Having got the Southern Agrarians out of the way—not an easy thing to do because they are always up there in the front row, sitting for their photographs—I went on to try to account for the various subjects and themes the writers of fiction in the South today have employed and how they differ from what one finds in, say, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, Farrell, Cozzens, and others. The Southern novelists have not been much concerned with social problems, with the exception of the racial issue. Nor is there more than a handful of city novels to compare with *Manhattan Transfer* or *Studs Lonigan*. The tradition of historical fiction is still strong in the South and it is notable that several Southern novelists—Tate, Lytle, and Hamilton Basso, for example—have written historical works or biographies of historical figures. What once would have been called “local color” fiction also persists, though there is a world of difference between the mountain people of Miss Murfree and Miss Roberts. I had to say a good deal, of course, about the increasing interest in Negro life and the relations between the two societies, an interest which becomes marked in the 1920's in the fiction of DuBose Heyward, Julia Peterkin, and E. C. L. Adams and still continues with unabated strength. Having disposed of these matters and some others, including separate consideration of Thomas Wolfe and Faulkner, I had a residue of fiction on my hands which was difficult to classify in the neat, schematic fashion preferred by literary historians. A good deal of contemporary Southern fiction, evidently, is intended to be humorous though its humor varies all the way from Faulkner's rogue stories about the Snopes clan and Erskine Caldwell's raffish treatment of the Lester family and the exploiters of God's little acre to the fantastic humor of Truman Capote and the grim and grotesque humor of Flannery O'Connor. The strain is

there, unmistakably, and so this question presented itself: is this strain something new in Southern writing or is there a tradition behind it? In the days when the literary comedians flourished, the South had a tradition of humorous writing which was the most vigorous in the country. Are there any connections to be traced between these two traditions or if no direct connections can be found, are there parallels striking enough to be worth talking about?

Until Carson McCullers confesses that she has been an assiduous reader of Henry Junius Nott's *Odds and Ends from the Knapsack of Thomas Singularity*, *Journeyman Printer* or Johnson J. Hooper's *Adventures of Simon Suggs*, or Flannery O'Connor admits that she treasures copies of *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor* and George Washington Harris' *Sut Lovingood Yarns* it may be impossible to document the flow of the one tradition into the other.¹ I do want to take a moment, however, to point out that public demand for the writings of the older humorists lasted much longer than has generally been supposed. It is true that most of the work of Joseph G. Baldwin, Davy Crockett, Harris, Hooper, Longstreet, Nott, William Tappan Thompson (the creator of Major Jones of Georgia), and T. B. Thorpe was in print before the Civil War. George William Bagby and "Bill Arp, So Called" came along soon after. But the popularity of these humorists down through the remaining decades of the century and, in some instances, even into this century has not been sufficiently explored. This older Southern humor did not merely cradle Mark Twain and when this important function was performed, vanish up attic. Editions of Joseph G. Baldwin's *Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi* continued to appear in the '80's and '90's and there was an edition published in Americus, Georgia (the Americus Book Co.) in 1908. For some reason the book was especially popular on the West Coast when it was first issued in 1876 (San Francisco) and went through at least four more printings, the last being in 1899.² Reprintings of the T. B. Peterson edition of Johnson J. Hooper's *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* continued to appear until 1881 and Americus honored Captain Suggs with an edition as late as 1928. The Harper and Brothers issues of

¹Two critics have tackled the question of William Faulkner's possible indebtedness to the Southern humorists. In the tenth chapter ("Frenchman's Bend and the Folk Tradition") of *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner* (1954), William Van O'Connor traces one episode in *The Hamlet* to A. B. Longstreet's "The Horse Swap" and another to "Sicily Burns's Wedding," one of the stories in George W. Harris's *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*. Carvel Collins, in "Faulkner and Certain Earlier Southern Fiction" (*College English*, XVI [Nov., 1954], 92-97) is more sceptical of any direct influence. The general purport of his article is that though parallels can be found, Faulkner uses humor and violence for larger purposes than did the humorists of the Old Southwest. "He is drawn to their essentials and motifs, but fundamentally his work is quite removed from them in both purpose and method."

²For information about the printing history of these Southern humorists I am indebted to the Bibliography in Walter Blair's *Native American Humor*, New York, 1937, and to his "The Popularity of Nineteenth-Century American Humorists" (*American Literature*, III [May, 1931], 175-194).

A. B. Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* continued until 1897, and there was an edition by J. O. Culpepper at Quitman, Georgia in 1894. William Tappan Thompson's *Major Jones* books were popular into the '80's. I have seen one curious edition (not listed by Blair) published by the W. L. Allison Company in 1893, with a made-up title, *Major Jones's Georgia Scenes*. The paper and binding are so cheap that the edition must have been got up to sell for a few cents. Blair lists only three editions of *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor*, by Madison Tensas, M. D. (1846, 1856, 1858), but I have seen a notice of it among the twenty-seven humorous works advertised at a dollar each in the 1881 Peterson reprint of Hooper's *Simon Suggs* and another in the 1879 Peterson reprint of *Major Jones's Courtship*. Possibly the longest survivor of these Southern humorous works is George Washington Harris's *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*. The old Dick and Fitzgerald edition is listed in the 1928 edition of the *United States Catalog*. My friend James B. Meriwether bought a copy recently. The imprint reads: Fitzgerald Publishing Corporation, Successor to Dick and Fitzgerald. The old plates were holding up well.

But this catalogue is not the complete story of the survival of interest in these writers. Henry Watterson's anthology, *Oddities in Southern Life and Character*, appeared first in 1882 but was in print as late as 1928. And if you will look in the *Library of Southern Literature*, that ambitious work in seventeen volumes which was issued between 1907 and 1923, you will find that the humorists are given a generous amount of space (only the Swamp Doctor is missing) and the biographies which introduce the selections are full and appreciative.

Meanwhile, we need to ask, did the tradition persist in fiction written after the Civil War? This is a crucial question and I wish I had a more satisfactory answer to it than I do. Here is a place where some extensive research needs to be done. Shields McIlwaine in his *The Southern Poor-White from Lubberland to Tobacco Road* (1939) treats the matter only incidentally. He was concerned first with trying to define as exactly as he could that slippery term "poor white," and then with following the fortunes of the poor whites through all Southern literature. But the older humor literature says next to nothing about class. The "take-home pay" and "income bracket" of Sut Lovingood and Simon Suggs are impossible to determine and you will recall that the narrator (it is Hooper of course) of "Taking the Census" was baffled at every turn in his attempt to make a statistical survey of the poultry population in Tallapoosa County. As a result, McIlwaine's necessary insistence on the criterion of class requires him to omit some writers who might be useful to us in this discussion. A good case in point is Miss Murfree, who is not mentioned in his book because, I gather, her mountaineers are a bracket above the poor whites. But Professor Parks, in his excellent biography of Miss Murfree, has pointed out that she probably knew and

was influenced by the humorists, particularly Longstreet and Harris. It is worth noting that many of her stories begin with setting, dialogue, and theme which suggest that the tale will be developed in the humorous vein. This is true, for example, of "Old Sledge at the Settlement" and "Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove." But invariably the practical joke or incipient knock-down fight is stopped off in time for a sentimental ending, just as, in her novel *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains*, the gander-pulling (a stock episode with the humorists) is not permitted to take place.

But it is high time that I came to grips with the question whether the parallels between the older Southern humor and the new are numerous and striking enough to warrant the use of the word revival, if not tradition. First to be noted is the fact that most of the characters in these tales—both the old and the new—move outside the society of people who are conventional, well-behaved, hard-working, God-fearing. In the older humor they are rogues, brawlers, con-men, gamblers, natural-born durned fools, hunters escaping from civilization into the wilderness. In the newest humor they are the Snopeses and the Ty Ty Waldens, the credulous, the un-educated, the religious fanatics; sometimes they are children or child-like adults and their Negro companions. In both literatures there is a war going on—a war between the untamable ones and the upholders of law and order. Simon Suggs' father, you will remember, was a "hard-shell" Baptist preacher who endeavored to rear his boys according to "the strictest requisitions of the moral law." But Simon, while he was still a "shirt-tail" boy, had begun to prepare himself for warfare against society. He had stolen his mother's roosters to fight them at Bob Smith's grocery and his father's plough-horses to enter them in "quarter" matches at the same place. He was already adept at "old sledge" and "seven up," weapons he used in his later skirmishes. When you come down to it, the central situation in Truman Capote's *The Grass Harp* is still another of these little wars against society. The escaped ones, who live in their tree house and do battle with rocks and mason jars against the ranks drawn up below them, are a dotty old woman, Dolly Talbo, her staunch Negro friend Catherine Creek, a young boy who never brought anyone home with him and never wanted to, and a senile judge who has nothing to do but stop in at the bank where his prissy-mouthed sons work, men who might have been twins "for they were both marshmallow-white, slump-shouldered, watery-eyed." Even in so mild a collection of humorous tales as the Major Jones series we find that the Major never can get on to the highfalutin' ways of his mother-in-law or his wife and doesn't really wish to.

Since there is a battle going on here most of the time between the ins and the outs (who have nothing but contempt for the way the ins lead their lives), in the humor of both periods there is a good bit of incidental satire of the occupations, manners, and recreations of respec-

table folk. I say incidental because social satire is by no means the main intention of these humorists, old or new. But we do get pleasantly distorted versions of genteel behavior as seen through the slant eyes of these outsiders. Major Jones is suspicious of the book learning his Mary Stallings is acquiring at the Female College in Macon and his awe-struck but somewhat contemptuous account of the graduation exercises there is good fun. One can find many matching passages in the contemporary humorists. Let me cite one example. In the course of his zany wanderings Haze Motes, head of the Church without Christ, in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, has to contend with the amorous advances of Sabbath Lily Hawks. Her chief worry is that she is a bastard and therefore "shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." She has sought counsel from a columnist who gives advice to the love-lorn: "Do you think I should neck or not? I shall not enter the kingdom of heaven anyway so I don't see what difference it makes." This answer comes back to her:

Dear Sabbath, Light necking is acceptable, but I think your real problem is one of adjustment to the modern world. Perhaps you ought to re-examine your religious values to see if they meet your needs in Life. A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper perspective and do not let it warf you. Read some books on Ethical Culture.

Sabbath needs more advice and tries again. "I says, 'Dear Mary, What I really want to know is should I go the whole hog or not? That's my real problem. I'm adjusted okay to the modern world.'"

In assessing the humor of both periods it is important, I believe, to remember that much of the reader's pleasure comes from this battle between the ins and the outs, between respectability and instinctual, irrational behavior. To make the battle more furious the humorists often resort to a grim and outlandish fantasy which carries their writing way beyond realism. In discussions of the older Southern humor the realistic aspects have, I believe, been over-stressed. You know how the argument goes. (I have used it often enough, myself.) These writers were close to the life of the common people, enjoyed the raciness of their talk, their sports and pastimes, and their rude horseplay. This argument will hold well enough for Baldwin's *Flush Times* and Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* but it cannot be stretched to cover some of the more nightmarish adventures of Sut Lovingood—his maltreatment of the Negro's corpse in "Frustrating a Funeral" for instance—or some of the episodes from the Louisiana Swamp Doctor's *Odd Leaves*. In the Doctor's story called "The Day of Judgment," he and some of his prankish friends provided the apocalyptic climax to a Negro camp meeting by saturating a mule's hide with turpentine and tar and sending him in flames through the singing

and screaming congregation. The most blood-chilling of the Doctor's stories describes his fight with a crazed and horrible-vizaged Negro dwarf who is conducting him through a swamp to visit a patient. His life is saved only because the Negro jumps into their camp fire and burns to death. And then there is the Doctor's gently humorous story of how the too curious boarding-house keeper is presented with a well-wrapped infant's corpse from which the face has been sliced away. George Harris, the creator of Sut, knew well enough that the violence and the grim humor of some of his stories were bound to offend. He makes Sut say, in the preface to *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*:

I dusn't 'speck this yere perduckshun wil sit purfleckly quiet ontu the stumicks ove sum pussons — them hu hes a holesum fear ove the devil, an' orter hev hit, by geminey. Now, fur thar speshul well-bein hereafter, I hes jis' this tu say: Ef yu ain't fond ove the smell ove cracklins, stay outen the kitchin; ef yu is fear'd ove smut, yu needn't climb the chimbley: an' ef the moon hurts yer eyes, don't yu ever look at a Dutch cheese. That's jis' all ove hit.

In the writing of contemporary Southern humorists there are a good many episodes which one "dusn't 'speck . . . sit purfleckly quiet ontu the stumicks ove sum pussons." To be quick about it I can instance the love affair between Ike Snopes and the cow and the hanging of the mule in Truman Capote's *Other Voices Other Rooms*. And then there is that pretty little love idyll, Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People," about the sexually precocious young Bible salesman who obligingly seduces the female Ph. D. in the hay loft so she will let him unfasten her wooden leg and add it to various other sexual trophies packed in his blue-lined suit-case. Even less well calculated to "sit purfleckly quiet ontu the stumicks ove sum pussons" are the goings-on in Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*: the strange marital life of the Amazonian Miss Amelia and the husband she discards; the arrival of the hunchback cousin whom she loves in her fashion; the league between Cousin Lymon and the husband, just returned from the penitentiary; and the final destructive fight between the husband and wife, another of those house-destroying, community-shattering battles which Southern humorists, old and new, write about.

There is no doubt that this aspect of life in the South (be it true or false) to which no satisfactory name has yet been given, has fascinated readers for a long time. The most persistent and possibly least qualified recorder of this variety of Southern life is Erskine Caldwell whose books sell in the millions and who is regarded by some French critics as a major American writer. He began well—I still think parts of *Tobacco Road*,

God's Little Acre, and *Trouble in July* are genuinely funny—but he has poured words into the mould of Sister Bessie too many scores of times and the later product is brittle and cheap. But one will have to admit that Jean-Paul Sartre when he became aware of the fact that there was French gold in these Southern hills and wrote *The Respectful Prostitute* to prove it, took Caldwell for his model rather than Faulkner. It is all very unfortunate, but what can the South do about it? Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor are as culpable or as valuable as Sut Lovingood and the Swamp Doctor and they are likely to have progeny.

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Humor In The Stream Of Southern History

From Jamestown to Little Rock the stream of southern history has flowed--a mighty stream tearing away at the banks of time and inertia. Academic scholars and rank amateurs alike have pulled common oars upon the bosom of this quickening flood. The more mature of these have labored to chart the course of the main stream, while the less pretentious have wallowed in the calmer eddies of local and personal history. Biography has loomed large in the interpretation of the South's past. Whether it be the monumental works that immortalize Washington, Jefferson, Pendleton, Lee, and Calhoun, or the shabby vanity press volumes which merely footnote the passing of little men who splashed in the shallows of the mighty stream, and within the safety of the family net, the regional story has a solid personal core.

Recorded local history, the history of the states, and specialized monographs run the count of published works to thousands of volumes and pamphlets. Books about the Civil War have already mounted to library proportions in numbers. North and South the chronicling of the great national crisis of a century ago has all but become a central theme in American history.

In all this vast storehouse of published southern history there is an unwavering note of sobriety. There is something paradoxical about southerners and their attitudes toward regional history. An objective reader quickly grasps the fact that the commitment of southern history to the printed page is a sober performance, and to deviate from the pattern is to break faith with a sacred tradition. Yet, safely away from the awesome permanence of the printed page, regional history assumes a delightful spirit of human whimsicalities.

In these latter years when emphasis is placed upon social and intellectual history, an occasional historian will comment on some of the

better known works of humorous writers of 1830 to 1860, and often an otherwise sober treatment of political history will be lightened by anecdote.

When the historian stops to make a closer analysis of southern humor he discovers several startling facts. First, no major political figure was notable for his sense of humor. One can scarcely imagine Edmund Pendleton, Chancellor George Wythe, or Patrick Henry turning humorist and rocking their audiences with gales of laughter. Edmund Pendleton telling a *genre* type story in a fine Lincolnesque vein would have been about as much out of character as Mark Twain's Colonel Sellers acting as investment consultant for the Federal Reserve Banking System.

George Washington may have been a humorous man, but if he was, his biographers have grossly libeled him. One scarcely envisions the dignified young Virginian spinning a whimsical yarn about his journey to the headstreams of the Ohio and the French forts with Christopher Gist and the drunken Half-King. It is not a matter of record that he reminisced lightly about the journey to the disastrous crossing of Turtle Creek with Braddock, or that he broke the tedium of those nagging days at Valley Forge by spinning yarns. Washington's presidential levees were hardly occasions where knots of men stood about telling humorous stories; they were, in fact, as devoid of humorous expression as were the Gilbert Stuart portraits.

If the master of Mount Vernon observed a strict dignity, so did the author of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson no doubt was a far more flexible man than was Washington, but he was hardly a humorist even in his most relaxed moments. His published letters occasionally seem humorous when read from a modern perspective, but actually any humor they contain derives largely from situation and subtlety rather than from intent.

Generally, southern statesmen and aristocrats were sober creatures, whether they were colonials, early nationalists, or ante-bellum cotton snobs. No one sensed this more than they themselves. Around their subject people, slaveowners had to maintain a certain amount of impressive dignity. Ever since the Negro arrived on the North American continent most white men have felt impelled to maintain at least a veneer of decorum in his presence. Certainly this was true on most southern plantations, and later in post-Civil War communities where there were concentrations of free Negroes. In such a situation humor tended to place someone in a socially inferior position, and yeoman and slave master alike could hardly afford to be made a dupe or a foil before the Negro.

In later years Bill Arp observed, "The aristocracy of the South was, before the war, mainly an aristocracy of dominion. The control of servants or employees is naturally elevating and ennobling, much more so than the mere possession of property. The scriptures always mention the number of servants when speaking of a patriarch's consequence in the land. This kind of aristocracy brought with it culture and dignity of bearing. Dominion dignifies a man just as it did in the days of the Centurion who said, 'I say unto this man go, and he goeth, and to another come, and he cometh.'"

Politics made as stern demand as slavery in demeanor. This is not to say that many a bumpkin and clown did not aspire to political favoritism, but generally they stirred only the shallow waters of local office-seeking. Aspiring southern politicians from the days of colonial Virginia magistrates to the current crop of gubernatorial candidates have needed to be clever in repartee, quick-witted in jest, but they could hardly afford to be made foils for campaign humor and hope to get anywhere with the electorate. This pattern was set early. Where Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe of the famous Virginia dynasty maintained a stiff political dignity of the best Washingtonian pattern, the eccentric John Randolph of Roanoke smashed it. Randolph could hardly be called a humorist even though his biting and uninhibited tongue slaughtered timid colleagues. His unorthodoxy often bordered on the ludicrous, and today many of his protests still seem as irrelevant as a heavy basso profundo in a gentle evening vespers.

In the West, that polished and natural political leader Henry Clay gave the stream of southern political history a distinctive human flavor, a quality largely lacking in the performances of his contemporaries. Dressed in backwoods Kentucky homespun he stampeded his Kentucky legislative colleagues into an anti-British panic while at the same time he coaxed the general assembly to favor self-seeking banking interests in Lexington. Clay's arguments and assaults on Felix Grundy inspired the scholarly William Littel to write as fine a bit of biblically worded satire as has appeared in southern literature.

Though Clay, a thoroughgoing extrovert, was able to sway great audiences with his eloquence, and to mould the will of juries to favor his cause in court, his letters and speeches are largely devoid of those rich human touches which graced his social intercourse. He captivated audiences, not so much with a bubbling type of Barkley humor, nor with mellifluous words, as with his auto-intoxication and oratorical mannerisms. He exerted tremendous personal magnetism in his public appearances. Scores of foreign travelers have left sparkling accounts of sitting spellbound in the House and Senate when the famous Kentuckian took the floor.

Where Clay's musical oratory and personal demeanor drew auditors in droves, John C. Calhoun was impressive only because of his ex-

cursions into the field of political theory and ideas. The historian searches in vain for humorous moments in either Calhoun's personality or the writings of his biographers. The man was devoid of the light human touch which was so much a part of the casual southerner's nature. It is not difficult to develop a deep interest in the theory of a concurrent minority or to follow hot sectional arguments over states' rights and nullification, but otherwise the historian tramples a dry sedge field in analyzing Calhoun's personality. The South Carolinian's lack of humor, and the fact that the issue of his period became so explosive may largely be charged in part to this massive wall of personal inflexibility.

If the leading political figures of the ante-bellum South were unbending and humorless in their approaches to issues, so were large segments of the politically important classes. As one observer said, they wandered in their orations through mazes of overwrought metaphors and inane images. In the period when Longstreet, Hooper, Harris, Baldwin, Field, and Kendall tickled the nation's funny bone with their descriptions of southern backwoodsmen and country bumpkins, the people of the region were rapidly losing their sense of humor. No southern aristocrat, with the exception of a few fringe ne'er-do-wells, was dangled on the humorist's pen. There are clever contemporary stories of slaves, of backwoodsmen, of pompous "phogbound" politicians, a few distaff ministers, and scores of poor whites, but almost none of plantation masters, cotton snobs, and big house society. It would appear incongruous even now to read of the doings of the southern aristocrat of Carter, Hampton, Byrd, or Polk stripe told in the vein of a Sut Lovingood yarn.

The Negro may have supplied a rich human touch of whimsicality to southern society, but as slave he helped to provoke an intensive seriousness of regional outlook. One of the great flaws in the history of slavery was the fact that slaveowners early concluded that abolitionist attacks on the institution of slavery was also an attack on southern morals. They lost their sense of humor over the issue and fought back with bitter invective and restrictive legislation. They read abolitionist literature with blood in their eyes and reacted as impulsively as only hotheaded men could.

On the other hand, the romantic concept of southern life which prevailed in many places among the upper social classes between 1830 and 1860 blinded them to the stern realities of the times. They raised protective shells of social form and behavior about themselves and their way of life which served notice that any invading humorous writer would be regarded as a social poacher. Flowery oratory, a patronizing attitude toward women, a defensive attitude toward regional economy, an enormous master-class political ego, a bigoted approach to religion and moral questions, and a highly defensive attitude toward chattel slavery denied the southern aristocracy that kind of human face which would have given greater cultural validity to its way of life.

Nowhere is the defensive attitude or supercilious sense of values of the ante-bellum South more clearly reflected than in popular attitudes toward the regional authors who struggled so desperately to make themselves known. Poe, Simms, Timrod, and Lanier either found themselves in disagreement with the more cultivated segments of life about them or failed to gain patronage. They hardly dared write of southern aristocracy in the whimsical vein of Longstreet, Hooper, Harris, and Baldwin, who immortalized the southern yeomanry, for fear of social and literary ostracism.

In the field of objective history writing, scholars who have dealt with slavery have been as serious-minded as were the plantation aristocrats. Books which describe southern social life treat economic and social problems from the standpoint of management, plantation organization, agricultural problems, and formal social intercourse. Political studies have penetrated deeply into the vitals of regional issues which forced great national decisions. Debates were deadly serious, and occasionally tempers flared to the point of physical violence. There were few Robert Toombses of Georgia and Robert Letchers of Kentucky to lighten trying moments with their uninhibited observations. One can hardly conceive of Robert Y. Hayne making a whimsical oratorical detour to cut at Daniel Webster, or of Jefferson Davis enlivening a cabinet meeting with a neatly spun yarn about southern life.

Before 1860 the gentleman of the Old South was caught in the serious oriental business of saving face. He and his class had prescribed that he must preserve his dignity by remaining in control of his social situation at all times. The pattern of life for the ante-bellum southern aristocrat had become codified well before either his society or the region had reached economic and social maturity. To have played a practical joke on an ante-bellum gentleman, or to have ridiculed him publicly would most certainly have demanded an answer at pistol point. The southern gentleman's code denied the existence of humor. Like the oriental, the aristocrat could not retain face and be the butt of a joke. Baldwin's Honorable Cave Burton of Kentucky had practiced law with the Wickliffes, Hardins, Crittendens, and Marshalls. He, "like Coleridge's soliloquies, branched out with innumerable suggestions, each in its turn the parent of others, and these again breeding a new spawn, so that the further he travelled the less he went on." Before the court he made sharp distinctions between the republican twelve who served the ends of justice, and the aristocrat who arbitrated the proceedings. Fringe aristocrat through the Honorable Cave was, he was one of the few gentlemen who were worsted in comic story, and he suffered only the innocent loss of a handful of fried oysters.

Paradoxically we have turned to this period in regional history for the personal symbol of the South. The "colonel"—whether he be a rosy-cheeked mortal standing before a Greek revival facade dripping

the dew of Mint Springs from his goatee and wearing a string black tie and a frock-tailed coat, or a lean and lanky colonel with fire in his eyes—is the symbol of the South. Whether he advertises bourbon whisky, wheat flour, a spring carnival, or a place to spend the night he is the embodiment of a dream, and a fond look backward. Even more than that, the colonel with layers of chins, a fog horn voice, and a sadly misplaced touch with reality is United States Senator Phogbound Claghorn, self-appointed protector of a way of life which he neither understands nor enriches.

A troublous interlude of Civil War brought a certain grimness to the South, even though the common soldier, caught in the throes of army life, was able to see the lighter side of his situation. Soldier humor, however, remained fairly well removed from the staid pages of Civil War history until the last decade or so, when historians have begun digging into collections of private letters and papers. War is never a humorous matter in any nation's history, yet good humor on the part of those doing the fighting is the very essence of military morale. Comic songs belittled leaders of both sections, and the officers found themselves caricatured and scolded by both cartoonists and jokemasters. They were given comic names, and were made central figures in comic legends. But historians of war were about as oblivious to this humor as were the ante-bellum cotton barons to the humor of the 1840's and '50's.

Post-Civil War southern history has been so vitally concerned with sectional strife and political issues that the basic humanity of the region has received too little attention. Hundreds of studies of one sort or another deal with the New South but almost none has its light moments or purple patches. Reconstruction engendered bitter hatreds which burned too deeply to permit much humor. Even the individual southerner's sense of humor was so badly dulled that he could see little that was cheerful in his region's plight. There was one exception: southerners seemed never to tire of "Beast" Butler stories. They never allowed him to forget his alleged affinity for silver spoons. It was said he visited Kokomo, Indiana, to speak in behalf of Grant's candidacy. He ordered a drink sent up to his hotel room and then asked the Negro boy to leave. When the boy lingered, the irascible defiler of New Orleans' womanly honor shouted, "Get out, you damed nigger!" to which the bell boy replied, "Not so fast massa Butler; I can't go yet. I'se 'sponsible for dat 'ar spoon." Then there was the one about the General speaking in another northern town when a huge spoon was lowered before his face, but the General was wholly unruffled; he grabbed it, saying "there is one I didn't get."

War and reconstruction made a vast difference in the mood in the South. These periods had a leveling influence. In the post-war South, country newspapers supplied an outlet for thousands of published stories, and a lack of news often forced editors to resort to original local

stories as fillers. Folksy stories found their way to readers with every weekly edition, and frequently the butts of jokes were named. The modern southerner, living without benefit of the code, could choose either to stand a lot of ribbing or bullwhip the editor.

Significantly, the southerner had lost most of his touchy sense of face and he could stand having a little fun poked at him without wanting to shoot the jokers. As Marse Henry Watterson said, "The crash came; and, like the unsubstantiated pageant of a dream, the pretty fabric fell. The great and the small, the good and the ill, were buried under one common ruin. There is hardly anything left of the gilded structure. It is no longer fashionable or respectable to fribble the days away in idle, costly pleasure. Battlescarred, time worn, and care-worn, the South that is, is most unlike the South that was." This fact the southern country newspaper ably reflected.

One of the unsubstantiated parts of the gilded dream which had crashed like a broken vase was exalted womanhood. To the editors, most females became women rather than ladies. As one of them said, "She was a creature composed of flesh, blood, paint, rings, false hair, old newspapers, and plenty of disguised cheek." To Bill Arp, an inveterate democrat, there were more fallen "Whig angels" who found themselves mixed in with the "big limbed, powerful young men and apple-cheeked, buxom girls" of the yeomanry than in the days when he kept lonely vigil at the University of Georgia. To him the New South had only two classes, those who had seen better days, and those who had not, and the difference had become as vague as a gentle memory. Southern social structure had undergone a reordering: there were fewer knights on horseback and more swains afoot, with the result that gallantry now asked for less assurance of virtue than ever before, and was less willing to make unnecessary efforts for its defense.

There was less danger after 1865 of having to fight some irate defender of female honor than there was in the ante-bellum decades. Thus it was that women became the object of much of the revised humor of the new era. On the subject of kissing, a Kentuckian of wide experience made the incisive observation that no two females kissed alike. The delicate little creatures merely brushed lips, while their aggressive sisters took to kissing like a hungry man to beefsteak. Somewhat less animated subjects struggled like hens burying themselves in the dust. The ideal, said the expert, was a kiss from a temporarily shy lass who warmed to her challenges with both soul and energy. The author of these observations said that he had carried the sacred memory of a kiss for twenty-one years and he believed it would be the last thing he would recall when the relentless coil of death strangled him.

Between the angry volleys fired at Grantism and pleas for new departures in southern Democratic loyalties in 1875, the vigorous young

editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* took time out to observe that the ladies had removed the Elizabethan ruffs from around their necks and put them around their legs. Henry Watterson believed "it took a stumble or a favorable breeze, or a shying horse to afford such pleasure, and when you catch a glimpse of the delicate ruffs, there is something between its old position and the new which lends enchantment to the scene that is worth a voyage across the Atlantic." "Yes," said a fellow editor, "and it is a notorious fact that the editor of the *Courier-Journal* is 'cock-eyed'; the view to him is one to which distance would lend no enchantment."

Further breaches were rammed into the Victorian shell of false modesty by the McDuffie, Georgia, *Journal* in its description of the woes and misadventures of a Miss Wilson of Pineville, North Carolina. Since young girlhood this lass had made her lonely way through life by the use of an artificial leg. The years had plied her with both fat and cynicism. As the bloom of youth faded into advanced maidenhood Miss Wilson turned introspective, and it was in this state of mind that a rowdy Baptist revival meeting stampeded her into seeking solace in the church. When the enthusiastic little minister led his weighty new convert to mid-stream and undertook to submerge her, the cork leg up-ended her in such a fashion that she was only partially baptised. The minister led her deeper into the stream which opened conquest with him for his charge, all of which Miss Wilson endured with patient fortitude until the minister called for a fifty-six pound weight to hobble her cork leg. This was too much, and Miss Wilson hobbled from the river to join the Presbyterians. To the editor this unhappy experience at the river was not so much a reflection upon hardy Baptist belief in total immersion as an indication that manufacturers should busy themselves making hollow legs for Baptists.

To Southerners marriage has ever been a sacred tender thing. Almost from the appearance of the first newspaper to the last Sunday edition, the press has chronicled the constant march of man and woman along the well-beaten path to the marriage altar. Social reporters have ever been taxed to find new words and phrases to describe what for them became a commonplace performance. Yet the long pedigree analyses of the social pages often sounded more like articles misplaced from breeders' gazettes than accounts of local fashion shows and the founding of new households. Those southerners who found their feet planted on the path to the marriage bower in the conventional way did little to arouse peculiar interests or to bestir the hand of the historian. It was those couples from the hard roads of the hedgerows and by-ways who tickled the risibilities of the irreverent, and who made more than a trite mark on the social register of time. A pious minister intoning a stereotyped wedding ceremony was hardly a match for a Georgia Justice-of-the-Peace who felt his barely literate way along through the complex legal forms

for marriage and a final will and testament. The Judge called upon a trembling yokel named Guss Keeling to "solemnly swear to take to the best of your knowledge an' belief this yer woman to have an' ter hold for yer self, yer heirs, exekyerters, administrators, and assigns, fer your and ther use an' behoof forever."

He then asked the bride "to take this yer man for yer husband, to hev and to hold forever; and do you further swear that you are lawfully seized in fee simple, are free from all encumbrances, and have good right to sell and convey the said grantee yerself, yer heirs, administrators, and assigns?"

After the venal judge had fee in hand he proceeded to conclude his legal responsibilities by declaring, "Know all men by these presents that I, being in good health and sound disposin' mind, in consideration of a dollar and fifty cents to me in hand paid, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, do and by these presents have declared you man and wife during good behavior, and until otherwise ordered by the court."

Thus life in the South following Appomattox flowed on between the Scylla of the common man struggling for respectability and the Charybdis of the aristocrat looking pleadingly to the historian for considerate remembrance. If gentlemanly honor, womanhood, and marriage had been tumbled from their pedestal eminence by the crude hands of time and incident, the politician was likewise brought to the mudsill level of esteem. In the very year that the South was slipping off the shackles of tortuous radical reconstruction Faunting D. Bobbitt of Kentucky declared to his dwindling constituency that he was "clay in the hands of the potter," to which an incisive editor retorted that the "plastic hand of nature, long since, moulded that clay into a certain domestic utensil—yellow, striped, of great occasional utility, but not mentionable in a strictly family paper."

This critical attitude of the forthright Kentuckian concerning some politicians was shared by Colonel Daniel Johnson of Mississippi. The governor of that state discovered that the president of the senate had failed to sign a railroad tax bill in the presence of the members of the upper house and that the state would be denied a vitally needed \$30,000 in revenue. There seemed to be little choice for the governor but to call the assembly back to Jackson. Colonel Johnson pleaded, "Don't. Please don't call the legislature back. I will pay my pro rata share rather than have them here again. Yes, I'll subscribe \$10.00 to make up the deficit if that body never meets again. Besides, if the Governor were to call them back, the people would arise and hang him, and it would be justifiable homicide."

Aside from the thousands of humorous stories which appeared in the county newspapers, some of the richest humor is to be heard in the oral accounts of political campaigning. Faithful service in the Confederate Army smoothed the path to public preferment in office. Possibly one of the best of the Confederate stories is that of a three-way race in South Carolina in which a non-veteran opposed two wearers of the gray for the office of sheriff. One of the old vets waved a dangling gray sleeve in the faces of the voters while he told of losing an arm at Gettysburg, and the second one hobbled across the platform on a wooden leg as he recalled the rigors of Chickamauga. These powerful demonstrations left the non-veteran little visible excuse for seeking office, but standing before the crowd he declared he deserved the office because he was the worst ruptured man in Fairfield County.

In Mississippi, waggish "Private" John Allen of Tupelo sprinkled a few oral thorns in the paths of the local brigadiers. In a joint debate with an ex-general he made a proposition which became a southern classic. The general explained how he had kept vigil in his tent the stormy night before Shiloh. Frequently he went to the fly of the tent and raised it to stare out into the storm at a lone sentry standing guard. John Allen thanked the general for his vivid description of that stormy moment before the decisive battle and explained to the audience that he had no tent that night—he was the sentry braving the storm. He then proposed that all those who were generals should vote for his opponent, but that all those who were privates should vote for him.

Congressman Allen was further to enrich southern political literature with his famous Tupelo fish hatchery speech in which he made the welkin ring for what sounded like a life and death issue with the people back home. While the Mississippian used a ready wit to land himself on the pages of history, a subtle Kentucky congressman bored his way into posterity with a keen gimlet-edged tongue. Proctor J. Knott, knowing more about whimsical oratory than Mesaba Range geology, spread the name Duluth abroad. His famous speech brought him enduring fame as a humorist, but embarrassment as a serious-minded bourbon county lawyer and politician. Like an ancient mariner stranded in the St. Croix he wore the Albatross of Duluth to the grave. Almost no people, including an unusually high percentage of Kentuckians, now know anything about his governorship, but they know about Duluth.

Unhappily there has gone unrecorded a rich vein of political banter and repartee which heightened an otherwise strenuous chapter in regional history. One of the most colorful figures in southern political history was the late Owsley A. Stanley. The Senator was an orator extraordinary who, in his day, made the welkin ring for God, home, and mother. He had a ready wit that flattened opponents from the day he determined to stir the political waters. As a fledgling lawyer he sought

election to Congress from a western Kentucky district. The Republicans called on their golden-tongued big gun William O. Bradley to come over into Gath to help stay the young David who had already wound his sling tight. They had not, however, informed the old Governor that he was to unsheath his mighty sword against a callow youth, and when he met the young lawyer on the platform he aimed his oratorical volley breast high and at close range. He told a story of soldiers patrolling the western plains under Phil Sheridan's command. A cavalry unit was strung out with a mule train traveling alongside a wooded range when Indian fire swept it in a surprise attack. The soldiers did not have time to dismount their cannon, so they loaded them and backed the mules toward the ridge and fired. Immediately an Indian chief broke from cover yelling, "Me surrender." The soldiers sought to persuade the chief to stand and fight, but he replied, "No! Me give up." No amount of persuasion could get him to return to battle. When he was asked why he wished to surrender he replied, "When they shoot jackasses at me, me give up." This thrust at a quick-witted Democrat in time caused many a Republican to wave the white flag. One final Republican victim by the name of Stanley was caught in the early days of the Eisenhower patronage slaughter and severed from the public pap. A bungling party axman thought he was beheading the old warrior of alien political faith.

Where an alert Stanley jousts with a sturdy spear of rich humor and ready wit, an army of southern politicians have pummeled their humorless ways into office. Blatant demagogues have flattened self-erected straw men all over the South with angry protestations of self-righteousness. The old Bourbons took themselves most seriously, pleading a kind of regional redemptionism from past evils. Under their guidance they promised penury, honesty, love of homeland, and close stewardship of regional honor and tradition. More often than not the wheel of post-war southern political decision turned on the slender spindle of personal issue which inflamed whole communities with open factionalism and blood feuds.

With Calhoun-like seriousness, the Tillmans, Vardamans, Hoggs, Smiths, Bilbos, Bleeses, Longs, and Talmadges have furiously campaigned the recent South on issues which contained more self-pity than humor. Occasionally one of these snapped at opponents with sharp-fanged rejoinders, or humbled protagonists with ridiculous charges, but it was not a part of the New South political technique to tolerate a lighter approach to campaigning. The so-called Southern demagogues may have been humorous figures in the sense that they functioned in an atmosphere of comedy, but it was a case where the audience, not the clown, made the act. Candidates have run scared themselves, and they have kept their constituencies excited to the point of their voting consistently "against" rather than "for" political change and reform. With the ogre

of economic failure, an unsettled race question, and a sapping extra-regional capitalism drain, there has been scarcely a moment in southern history since the first abolitionist cry was raised in the 1830's when the southern political scene was becalmed.

In a half century of agrarian unrest, the southern press and political platform heaped mountains of criticism on the enemies of the people, and upon the people themselves. A brutal economic hand bore God's chosen people down into the soil which they had butchered. Scarcely a week passed between 1870 and 1930 that an editor did not flay the southern farmer for his failure to change his ways of doing things. Every fall was in fact a grand rehearsal for the ultimate day of human reckoning when merchants dragged out the big leather books to balance tiny victories against mighty economic misdeeds. As grim as this losing battle against the fierce erosion of flagging staple crop economy was, there was somewhere in the South one soul who still had humor enough to soliloquize on the plight of the one-gallused farmer. He wrote:

Over a hill trailed a man behind a mule drawing a plow. Unexpectedly the plow hit a root, the mule stopped, and the man began to grumble as he fixed the hames: Bill, you are just a mule, the son of a jackass, and I am a man made in the image of God. Yet here we work hitched up together year after year. I often wonder if you work for me or I work for you. Verily, I think it is a partnership between a mule and a fool; for surely I work as hard as you, if not harder. Plowing or cultivating we cover the same distance, but you do it on four legs and I on two, therefore I do twice as much as you.

Soon we will be preparing for a corn crop. When the corn is harvested I give one-third to the landlord for being so kind as to let me use a small speck of God's earth. One-third goes to you, the rest is mine. You consume all your portion, while I divide mine among seven children, six hens, two ducks and a storekeeper. If we both need shoes, you get 'em. You are getting the best of me, and I ask you, is it fair for a mule, the son of a jackass, to swindle a man, the lord of creation, out of his substance?

Why, you only help to plow and cultivate the ground, and I alone must cut, shock, and husk the corn, while you look over the pasture fence and hehaw at me. All fall and most of the winter the whole family from baby up picks cotton to help raise enough money to pay taxes and buy a new set of harness and pay the mortgage on you. Not a thing, you ornery cuss, do you have to do. I even have to do the worrying about the mortgage on your tough, ungrateful hide.

About the only time I am your better is on election day, for I can vote and you can't. After election I realize that I was fully as big a jackass as your papa. Verily, I am prone to wonder if politics were made for a man or a jackass, or to make jackasses out of men.

And that ain't all, Bill, when you are dead, that's supposed to be the end of you. But me? The preacher tells me that when I die I may go to hell forever. That is, Bill, if I don't do just as they say. And most of what they say keeps me from getting any fun out of life.

Tell me, William, considering these things, how can you keep a straight face and still look so dumb and solemn?

Thus the stream of southern history flows on in an ever-quicken-
ing tide. The historian is called upon to pursue objective fact through
the tortuous breakers of sectional emotionalism to bring meaning to
the South's past. The seriousness with which social, economic, and
political issues have asserted themselves has all but obscured the role of
humor in regional history. One could hardly expect otherwise in a land
where nearly every major political act has embodied an element of crisis,
and epic moments have been fraught with tragedy. The defensiveness of
the South during the last century and a half has all but blinded its
historians to the regional importance of those whimsicalities which have
served individual southerners so well as social and spiritual lubricants.

ARTHUR PALMER HUDSON

University of North Carolina

Animal Lore In Lawson's And Brickell's Histories Of North Carolina

In his *American Folklore*,¹ Richard M. Dorson states: "What we may call American folklore resulted from the grafting of Old World beliefs onto the New World environment, and the generation of new folk fancies within old forms. . . . The American setting supplied three special themes." Among these themes were "the strange denizens [which] furnished the stuff of sensational reports." Mr. Dorson notes a number of the reports by writers on the Carolinas. This paper examines first editions of two books about North Carolina, alluded to by Mr. Dorson, for additional examples of animal lore touched by fancy.

Two classics of North Carolina colonial writing are John Lawson's so-called *History of North Carolina* (London, 1709) and Dr. John Brickell's *The Natural History of North-Carolina* (Dublin, 1737). The relationship between the two books has been examined in detail by Percy G. Adams, who concludes his study with the statement: "Although historians need not stop using Dr. John Brickell entirely, they should be careful in giving him credit for anything, since six-sevenths of his material was taken from John Lawson, a first-rate narrator and observer whose reputation would be even greater if it had not suffered because of the over-long life of his alter-ego."² Happily, the extent of Dr. Brickell's plagiarism is of small concern to the folklorist. In fact, it has its advantages, for to Lawson's *verbatim* account of strange critters Brickell usually adds details and anecdotes, sometimes larded with allusions to Pliny's *Natural History* (e.g., p. 150) and with echoes from the old bestiaries, which make the folklorist lick his chops.

¹(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 8-9. This article is reprinted, with permission, from the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, VIII (December 1960), 1-15.

²"John Lawson's Alter-Ego — Dr. John Brickell," *The North Carolina Historical Review*, XXXIV (July 1957), 313-326.

A NEW
VOYAGE
TO
CAROLINA;
CONTAINING THE
Exact Description and Natural History
OF THAT
COUNTRY:

Together with the *Present State* thereof.

AND
A JOURNAL
Of a Thousand Miles, Travel'd thro' several
Nations of *INDIANS*.
Giving a particular Account of their Customs,
Manners, &c.

By JOHN LAWSON, Gent. Surveyor-
General of *North-Carolina*.

LONDON:
Printed in the Year 1709.

The NATURAL
HISTORY
OF
North - Carolina.

WITH AN
ACCOUNT
OF THE

Trade, Manners, and Customs of the
CHRISTIAN and INDIAN Inhabitants. Il-
lustrated with *Copper-Plates*, whereon are
curiously Engraved the *Map* of the Country,
several strange *Beasts, Birds, Fishes, Snakes,*
Insects, Trees, and Plants, &c.

By JOHN BRICKELL, M. D.

Nostra nos in urbe peregrinamur. CIC.

DUBLIN:

Printed by JAMES CARSON, in *Coghill's-Court, Dame-
street*, opposite to the *Castle-Market*. For the AUTHOR,
1737.

It has been conjectured that Lawson belonged to an important Yorkshire family, the date of his birth being unknown. In the year 1700 he came to the Carolinas, and made a journey of exploration from Charleston, South Carolina, up the rivers to the vicinities of present Salisbury and Hillsboro, North Carolina, thence down the Eno and the Neuse rivers to the English settlements on the coast. He became one of the incorporators of the town of Bath, wrote his *History of North Carolina* (so called), and was appointed Surveyor-General of the Colony by the Lords Proprietors. In 1709 he was in London, probably attending to the publication of his book. In 1710 he returned to North Carolina and in 1712, while with a party exploring the headwaters of the Neuse, was killed by Indians. He was reported to have died from the effect of having pitch-pine splinters stuck into his body and set on fire.³ His book has been often reprinted, and has been published in several translations into other languages.

Of Dr. John Brickell, less is known, "except that in the 1730's he resided for several years on the coast of North Carolina before returning to live in England and publish his *Natural History*," drawn largely from Lawson's book. "Of his book, more is known," which Mr. Adams summarizes in the article referred to above. One interesting fact is that the name of Mr. Samuel Johnson appears on the list of "Subscribers" (p. xi). Readers of *Gulliver's Travels* may speculate whether Dr. Brickell's book fell under the scrutiny of a citizen of Dublin who was his contemporary and took a dim view of travel books.

And now for the menagerie. Lawson is the chief showman, Dr. Brickell occasionally grooming his beasts and now and then exhibiting some of his own. Lawson was no expert zoologist. Neither is his present introducer. If Lawson's taxonomy seems a bit weird at times, it is still good enough for folklore. Let Lawson be his own pitchman.

In "A Journal of a Thousand Miles Travel among the Indians, from South to North Carolina," which forms the first part of his book (pp. 6-60), writing under date of Thursday, September 6, 1700, somewhere in the Santee country, Lawson says (pp. 22-23): "We had a very large Swamp to pass over near the House, and would have hir'd our Landlord to have been our Guide, but he seem'd unwilling; so we press'd him no farther about it. He was the tallest *Indian* I ever saw, being seven Foot high, and a very strait compleat Person, esteem'd on by the King for his great Art in Hunting, always carrying with him an artificial Head to hunt withal: They are made of the Head of a Buck, the back Part of the Horns being scrypt and hollow for Lightness of Carriage. The Skin is left to the setting on of the Shoulders, which is lin'd round

³For further details, see Frances Latham Harriss' edition of *Lawson's History of North Carolina* (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett and Massie, Publishers, 1951), pp. ix-xvii.

with small Hoops, and flat Sort of Laths, to hold it open for the Arm to go in. They have a Way to preserve the Eyes, as if living. The Hunter puts on a Match-coat made of Deer's Skin, with the Hair on, and a Piece of the white Part of a Deer's Skin, that grows on the Breast, which is fasten'd to the Neck-End of this stalking Head, so hangs down. In these Habiliments an *Indian* will go as near a Deer as he pleases, the exact Motions and Behaviour of a Deer being so well counterfeited by 'em, that several Times it hath been known for two hunters to come up with a stalking Head together, and unknown to each other, so that they have kill'd an *Indian* instead of a Deer, which hath happen'd sometimes to be a Brother, or some near Friend; for which Reason they allow not of that sort of Practice, where the Nation is populous."

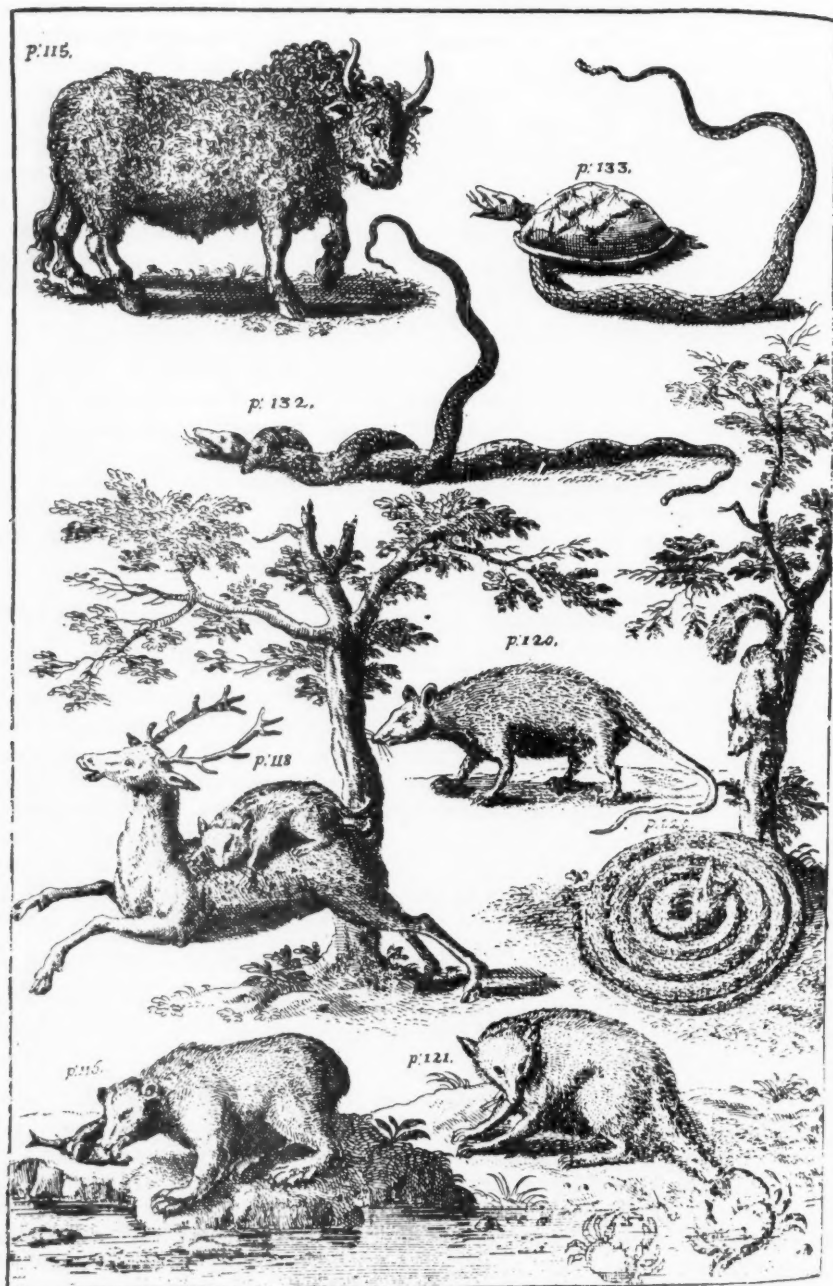
Of a later incident in the journey Lawson writes (p. 27): "By the Way, our Guide kill'd more Turkeys, and two Polcats, which he eat, esteeming them before fat Turkeys." In his "Description of North-Carolina," describing the polecat (p. 119), he observes: "They smell like a Fox, but ten times stronger. When a Dog encounters them, they piss upon him, and he will not be sweet again in a Fortnight or more. The *Indians* love to eat their Flesh, which has no manner of ill Smell, when the Bladder is out."

In an account of a state dinner given Lawson's party by the king of the Waxhaw Indians, Lawson remarks (p. 38): "When the Viands were brought in, the first Figure began with kicking out the Dogs, which are seemingly Wolves, made tame with starving and beating; they being the worst Dog-Masters in the World; so that it is an infallible Cure for Sore-Eyes, ever to see an *Indian* Dog fat. They are of a quite contrary Disposition to Horses; some of their Kings have gotten, by good Chance, a Jade, stolen by some neighbouring *Indian*, and transported farther into the Country, and sold; or bought sometimes of a *Christian*, that trades amongst them. These Creatures they continually cram, and feed with Maiz, and what the Horse will eat, till he is as fat as a Hog; never making any farther use of him than to fetch a Deer home that is killed somewhere near the *Indian* Plantation."

"A Description of North Carolina" contains a systematic account of "The Beasts." Here Lawson enjoyed an advantage like that of Adam and Eve in the Garden.

Beavers (p. 120)

"If you take them young, they become very tame and domestick, but are very mischievous in spoiling Orchards, by breaking the Trees, and blocking up your Doors in the Night with the Sticks and Wood they bring thither. If they eat any thing that is salt, it kills them."



From The First Edition, in The Carolina Collection of the Louis R. Wilson Library
of the University of North Carolina.

Possum (pp. 120-21)

"The *Possum* is found no where but in *America*. He is the Wonder of all the Land-Animals, being the size of a Badger, and near that Colour. The Male's Pizzle is placed retrograde; and in time of Coition, they differ from all other Animals, turning Tail to Tail, as Dog and Bitch when ty'd. The Female, doubtless, breeds her Young at her Teats; for I have seen them stick fast thereto, when they have been no bigger than a small Raspberry, and seemingly inanimate. She has a Paunch, or false-Belly, wherein she carries her young, after they are from those Teats, till they can shift for themselves. Their Food is Roots, Poultry, or wild Fruits. They have no Hair on their Tails, but a sort of a Scale, or hard Crust, as the Bevers have. If a Cat has nine Lives, this Creature surely has nineteen; for if you break every bone in their Skin, and mash their Skull, leaving them for Dead, you may come an hour after, and they will be gone quite away, or perhaps you may meet them creeping away. They are a very stupid Creature, utterly neglecting their Safety. They are most like Rats of any thing. I have, for Necessity in the Wilderness, eaten of them. Their Flesh is very white, and well tasted; but their ugly Tails put me out of Conceit with that Fare. They climb Trees, as the Raccoons do. Their Fur is not esteem'd nor used, save that the *Indians* spin it into Girdles and Garters."

Dr. Brickell elaborates this sketch (p. 125): "The She one has a false Belly or Paunch, which covers her Teats, and wherein she carries her Young; in the middle of which is a Hole, where the young ones creep in and out, for the Female will lye down upon a Bank, and the young come out to sun themselves, and return in at Pleasure, yet the Female will contract this Paunch to secure and close it together, that she will swim over large Ponds and Creeks of Water with her Young, without any danger of their being drowned." Lawson's statement about the vitality of the possum Dr. Brickell puts in proverb form — "and it is a common saying in *Carolina*, that if a *Cat* has nine Lives, a *Possum* has nineteen" — assuredly one of the earliest North Carolina proverbs on record, if not the earliest.

The Raccoon (p. 121)

"The Raccoon is of a dark-gray Colour; if taken young, is easily made tame, but is the drunkenest Creature living, if he can get any liquor that is sweet and strong. They are rather more unlucky than a Monkey. When wild, they are very subtle in catching their Prey. Those that live in the Salt-Water, feed much on Oysters which they love. They watch the Oyster when it opens, and nimbly put in their Paw, and pluck out the Fish. Sometimes the Oyster shuts, and holds fast their Paw till the Tide comes in, that they are drown'd, tho' they swim very well. The Way

that this Animal catches Crabs, which he greatly admires, and which are plenty in *Carolina*, is worthy of Remark. When he intends to make a Prey of these Fish,⁴ he goes to a Marsh, here standing on the Land, he lets his Tail hang in the Water. This the Crab takes for a Bait, and fastens his Claws therein, which as soon as the *Raccoon* perceives, he, of a sudden, springs forward, a considerable way, on the Land, and brings the Crab along with him. As soon as the Fish finds himself out of his Element, he presently lets go his hold, and then the *Raccoon* encounters him, by getting him cross-wise in his Mouth, and devours him. There is a sort of small Land-Crab, which we call a *Fiddler*, that runs into a Hole when anything pursues him. This Crab the *Raccoon* takes by putting his Fore-Foot in the Hole, and pulling him out. With a tame *Raccoon* this Sport is very diverting" Dr. Brickell (p. 123) picks up Lawson's comparison of the raccoon with a monkey and takes him "to be a Species of the *Monkey* . . . the Feet are form'd like a Hand . . . they are very Apish."

Bears (pp. 116-17)

In his full account of the bears, Lawson mentions several curious facts or beliefs. "There is one thing more to be consider'd of this Creature, which is, that no Man, either Christian or *Indian*, has ever kill'd a She-Bear with Young. It is supposed, that the She-Bears, after Conception, hide themselves in some secret and undiscoverable place, till they bring forth their young, which, in all Probability, cannot be long; otherwise, the *Indians*, who hunt the Woods like Dogs, would, at some time or other, have found them." Of bear hunting with dogs, he remarks: "If a Dog is apt to fasten, and run into a Bear, he is not good, for the best Dog in *Europe* is nothing in their Paws; but if ever they get him in their clutches, they blow his Skin from his Flesh, like a Bladder, and often kill him."

Panthers (p. 118)

Describing the characteristics and habits of the panther, Lawson declares: "No Creature is so nice and clean, as this, in his Food. When he has got his Prey, he fills his Belly with the Slaughter, and carefully lays up the Remainder, covering it very neatly with Leaves, which if any thing touches, he never eats any more. He purrs as Cats do; if taken when Young, is never to be reclaim'd from his wild Nature. He hollows like a

⁴Lawson's allusion to the crab as a fish is reminiscent of a story about the American naturalist Agassiz (1835-1910). A Harvard freshman wrote, on an examination, "A crab is a red fish that swims backward." Agassiz commented, "There are only three things wrong with the description: A crab is not a fish, is not red till it is boiled, and does not swim backward."

Man in the Woods, when kill'd. . . . His Flesh looks as well as any Shambles-Meat whatsoever; a great many People eat him, as choice Food; but I never tasted of a Panther, so cannot commend the Matter by my own experience."

Wolves (p. 119)

"They are often so poor, that they can hardly run. When they catch no Prey, they go to a Swamp, and fill their Belly full of Mud; if afterwards they chance to get any thing of Flesh, they will disgorge the Mud, and eat the other."

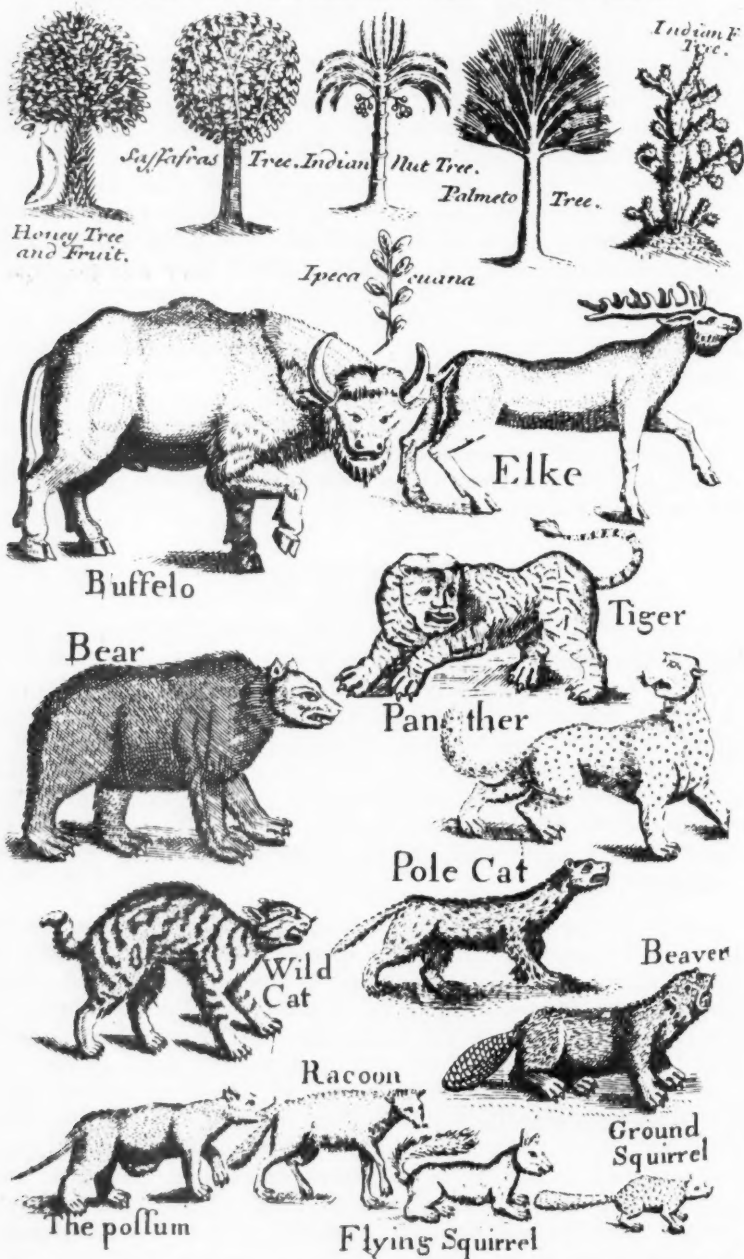
Tigers (p. 119)

"Tigers are never met withal in the Settlement; but are more to the Westward, and are numerous on this Side of the Chain of Mountains. I once saw one, that was larger than [sic] a Panther, and seem'd to be a very bold Creature."

Minks (pp. 121-22)

"They are bold Thieves, and will steal any thing from you in the Night, when asleep, as I can tell by Experience; for one Winter, by Misfortune, I ran my Vessel a-ground, and went often to the Banks, to kill wild Fowl, which we did a great many. One Night, we had a mind to sleep on the Banks (the Weather being fair) and wrapt up the Geese which we had kill'd, and not eaten, very carefully in the Sail of a Canoe, and folded it several Doubles, and for better Security, laid 'em all Night under my Head. In the Morning when I wak'd, a Minx had eaten thro' every Fold of the Canoe's Sail, and thro' one of the Geese, most part of which was gone."

Under the caption "Insects of North Carolina" Lawson describes "Allegators, Rattlesnakes," and other species of snakes, "Scorpions, Lizards, Frogs, Tortois, Terebin Land and Water, Brown Lizard, Rottenwood Worm," etc. In doubt about his taxonomy, he says, "Tortois, vulgarly call'd Turtle; I have rank'd these among the Insects, because they lay Eggs, and I did not know well where to put them" (133). In her "Foreword" to her edition of the *History* (p. x), Frances Latham Harris remarks: "Lawson's classification of alligators, snakes, terrapins, lizards, etc., as 'insects' sounds remarkably ignorant to modern ears. It appears the word was used in his day as a synonym of strange, unknown, and is still used colloquially in certain parts of England to indicate anything that crawls." The *Oxford English Dictionary*, after indicating animals ordinarily included under "insect," adds, "formerly (and still by the



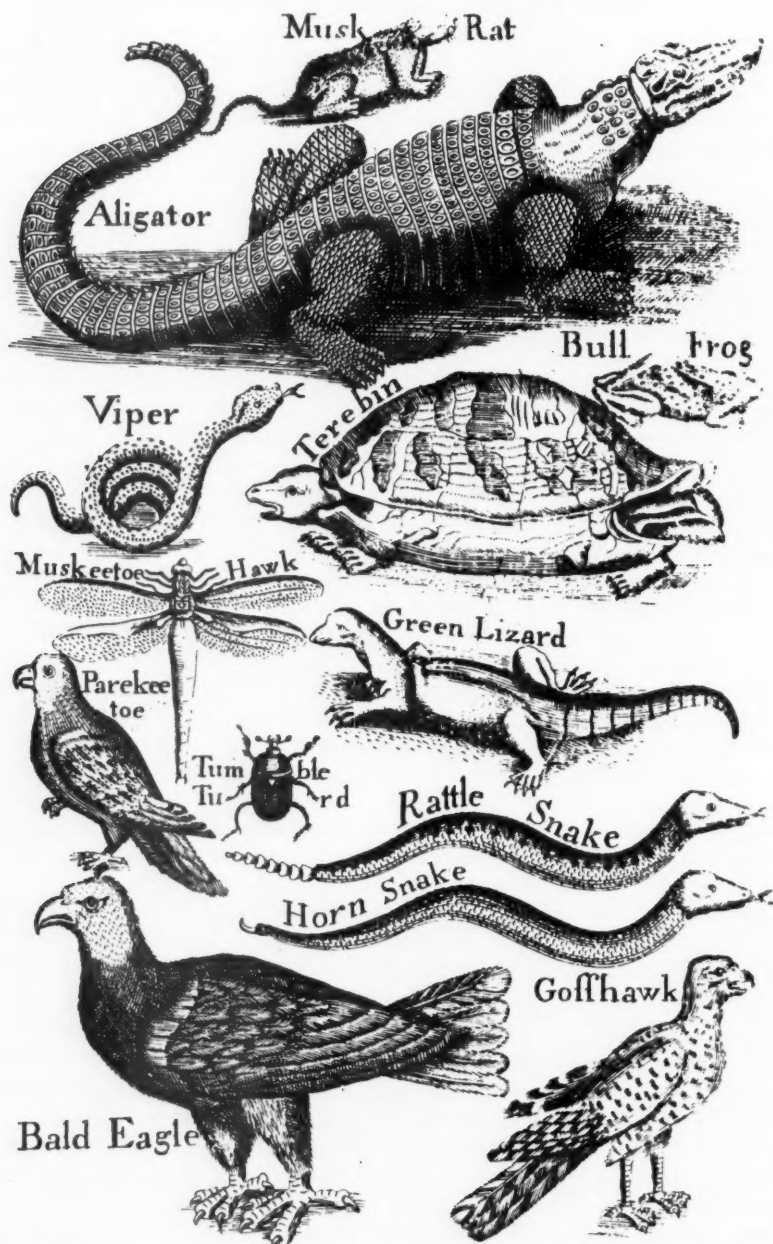
From The First Edition, in The Carolina Collection of the Louis R. Wilson Library of the University of North Carolina.

uneducated) applied still more widely, *e. g.* to earthworms, snails, and even some small vertebrates, as frogs and tortoises," but does not cite examples of usage applied to alligators and snakes; neither do the dialect dictionaries I have consulted. Dr. Brickell seems to be a better taxonomist, and we shall turn to him for a true example of an insect, the Samson of them all, the tumblebug.

Alligators (p. 127)

Lawson gives the place of honor to alligators. "They roar, and make a hideous Noise against bad Weather, and before they come out of their Dens in the Spring. I was pretty much frightened with one of these once; which happened thus: I had built a House about half a Mile from an *Indian* Town, on the Fork of Neuse-River, where I dwelt by myself, excepting a young *Indian* Fellow and a Bull-Dog, that I had along with me. I had not then been so long a Sojourner in *America*, as to be thoroughly acquainted with this Creature. One of them had got his Nest directly under my House, which stood on pretty high Land, and by a Creek-side, in whose Banks his Entering-place was, his Den reaching the Ground directly on which my House stood. I was sitting alone by the Fireside (about nine a Clock at Night, sometime in *March*) the *Indian* Fellow being gone to town, to see his Relations; so that there was no body in the House but myself and the Dog; when, all of a sudden, this ill-favor'd Neighbour of mine, set up such a Roaring, that he made the House shake about my Ears, and so continued, like a Bittern, (but a hundred times louder, if possible) for four or five times. The Dog stared, as if he was frightened out of his Senses; nor indeed, could I imagine what it was, having never heard one of them before. Immediately again I had another Lesson; and so a third. Being at that time amongst none but Savages, I began to suspect, they were working some Piece of Conjururation under my House, to get away my Goods; not but that, at another time, I have as little Faith in their, or any others working Miracles, by diabolical Means, as any Person living. At last, my Man came in, to whom when I had told the Story, he laugh'd at me, and presently undeceiv'd me, by telling me what it was that made the Noise."

Among Dr. Brickell's considerable additions to Lawson's lengthy treatment of the alligator is this one, that must have been of interest to male readers: "the teeth of the right jaw bound about the Arm, are said to provoke *Venery*" (p 137). Lawson had gone him one better in his observation (p. 162) that "Man of Noses are a Shell-Fish commonly found amongst us. They are valued for increasing Vigour in Men, and making barren Women fruitful; but," he dryly adds, "I think they have no need of that Fish; for the Women in *Carolina* are fruitful enough."



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Rattlesnakes (p. 128)

Lawson devotes a page and a half to the rattlesnake, describing its appearance, size, habitat, venomous bite, cures for the bite ("four sorts of Snake-Roots already discover'd"), its peaceable disposition, its power to charm small animals and birds, its increased venomousness during hot weather, and the use of its skin, rattles, and venom for human medication. Dr. Brickell doubles the space devoted to the rattlesnake (pp. 142-157), adding further descriptive details and relating an anecdote.

"I hope it will not be displeasing to the Reader to insert the following Account in relation to a *Rattle-snake* and a Dog, as it happened during my residence there, viz. A Planter having taken a *Rattle-snake* in a Moose, put it into a Barrel, and brought it to *Edentown*, and told the Inhabitants, that if they would make him drink, he would shew them some Diversion; that he had a living *Rattle-snake*, and a Dog that would fight it, who had killed several in his time; the proposal was readily consented to by all that were present. The Planter immediately turned out the Snake (which was very large) whilst another held the Dog, as we generally do our Bull-Dogs. A large Ring was instantly made, and everyone cry'd out for fair play, viz. That the Snake should have time to gather itself into a Quoil, or posture of Defence, which it very quickly did, and began to Rattle it's Tail. Every thing being ready, the Dog was let loose, and attacked the Snake; his usual way of killing them, was, to shake them at full length out of their Quoil, in which Posture they can neither leap nor bite; but this Snake being so large, the Dog had not strength enough to do it. In the first encounter he only bit it, which the Snake as readily returned, biting the Dog by the Ear, which made him cry and quit his hold, and seem'd to be stun'd, or like one in a Megrim. But the Company encouraged the Dog, and set him on again: In the second encounter it bit the Dog by the Lip, and immediately after bit itself; the Dog in a little time began to cry and reel about as if drunk or in a Megrim, grew regardless of his Master's calling him, and in half an Hour dyed, and the Snake in about a Quarter. I had not related this, had I not been an Eye-witness to the whole proceeding. The Poyson both of Viper and Mad-dog (I conceive) kill by thickning of the Blood after the manner that Rennet congeals Milk when they make Cheese."

Horn Snakes (p. 130)

One of the most horrific creatures in American folklore is the hoop snake. Its prototype is the horn snake. "Of the Horn-Snakes," writes Lawson, "I never saw but two, that I remember. They are like the Rattle-Snake in Colour, but rather lighter. They hiss exactly like

a Goose, when any thing approaches them. They strike at their Enemy with their Tail, and kill whatsoever they wound with it, which is arm'd at the End with a horny Substance, like a Cock's Spur. This is their Weapon. I have heard it credibly reported, that a small Locust-Tree about the thickness of a Man's Arm, being struck by one of these Snakes, at Ten a Clock in the Morning, then verdant and flourishing, at four in the Afternoon was dead, and the leaves red and wither'd. Doubtless, be it how it will, they are very venomous. I think, the *Indians* do not pretend to cure their Wound." Dr. Brickell blows up the "small Locust-Tree" into a pine and adds other lethal details. It is but a step to have the horn snake roll like a hoop and launch itself like a spear at its enemy.⁵

The Blacksnake (p. 132)

"The long, black Snake," states Lawson, "frequents the Land altogether, and is the nimblest Creature living. His bite has no more Venom, than a Prick with a Pin. He is the best Mouser that can be; for he leaves not one of the Vermine alive, where he comes. He also kills the Rattle-Snake, wherever he meets him, by twisting his Head about the Neck of the Rattle-Snake, and whipping him to death with his Tail. This Whipster haunts the Dairies of careless Housewives, and never misses to skim the Milk clear of the Cream. He is an excellent Egg-Merchant, for he does not suck the Eggs, but swallows them whole (as all Snakes do). He will often swallow all the Eggs from under a Hen that sits, and coil himself under the Hen, in the Nest, where sometimes the Housewife finds him. This Snake, for all his Agility, is so brittle, that when he is pursued, and gets his Head into the Hole of a Tree, if any body gets hold of the other end, he will twist, and break himself off in the middle. One of these Snakes, whose Neck is no thicker than a Woman's little Finger, will swallow a Squirrel: so much does that part stretch, in all these Creatures."

In Mississippi the "Whipster" is not the blacksnake but a thicker, leadcolored snake called the coachwhip, that is said to catch little boys "and wrop himself around them and whup them to death." There, too, the fragility of the blacksnake is attributed to the "j'int snake," that, broken into pieces and scattered over a field, will after sundown, re-assemble himself. (See "Brimstone Snake," below)

The King Snake (p. 132)

"The King-Snake," according to Lawson, "is the largest of all others, and not common; no Snake (they say) will meddle with them.

⁵Cf. Thomas D. Clark, "The Snake in Mississippi Folklore," *Specimens of Mississippi Folklore*, ed. by A. P. Hudson (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edward Brothers, 1928), p. 142.

I think they are not accounted venomous. The *Indians* make Girdles and Sashes of their Skins."

The Brimstone Snake (p. 134)

"The Brimstone is so called," Lawson believes, "because it is of a Brimstone Colour. They might as well have call'd it a Glass-Snake, for it is as brittle as a Tobacco-Pipe, so that if you give it the least touch of a small Twigg, it immediately breaks into several Pieces. Some affirm, that if you let it remain where you broke it, it will come together again. What harm there is in this brittle Ware, I cannot tell; but I never knew any body hurt by them.

The Terrapin (p. 132)

Of the "Land Terebin" Lawson reports: "They are an utter Enemy to the Rattle-Snake, for when the Terebin meets him, he catches hold of him a little below his Neck, and draws his Head into his Shell, which makes the Snake beat his Tail, and twist about with all the Strength and Violence imaginable to get away; but the Terebin soon dispatches him, and then leaves him."

The Tumblebug (Brickell, pp. 161-62)

From alligators, rattlesnakes, and "terebins," paraded by Lawson under the banner of "Insects," we pass to a real insect, the noblest of his kind, described by Dr. Brickell under a less elegant name. "The Tumble-Turds, are a Species of Beetles, and so called, from their constant rowling the Horse-Dung (whereon they feed) from one place to another 'til it is no bigger than a small Bullet. They are one of the strongest Insects, of the same Size I have ever seen; they frequently fly into Houses, and I have seen one of them move a brass Candlestick from one place to another upon a Table, which seem'd very strange to me at first; for not long after my arrival, being one Night at a Planter's House, who had secretly conveyed two of these Insects under two different Candlesticks; amongst other Discourses, he told me, he would make the Candlesticks move about the Table by a certain Spell, as he pretended: He had all this time kept the Candlesticks in his Hands on the Table. I was very desirous to see this performance; he immediately takes his hands from the Candlesticks, and struck three Times under the Table, and seemed to mutter some few Words (as Juglers are known to do) which he had no sooner ended, but the Candlesticks began to move backwards and forwards, to my great surprize, for I could imagine nothing else but that it had been some secret Charm he had got from the *Indians*, who are great Conjurers. After the Company had sufficiently diverted themselves at

my surprize, and how desirous I was to have this Charm communicated to me, one of the Company takes up the Candlesticks, and discovers the Insects."

The Bald Eagle (p. 137)

As is to be expected, the lore of birds, while more factual, perhaps, than is that of animals, is not so touched with fancy.

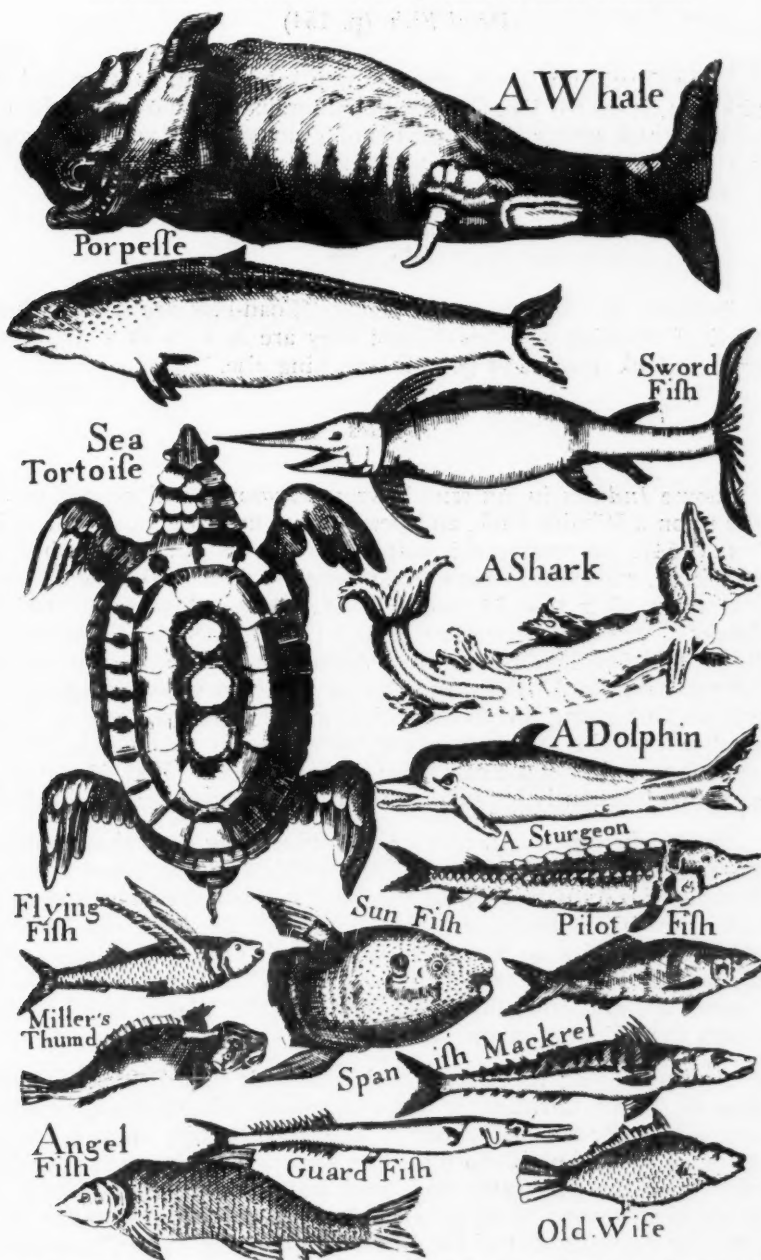
The bald eagle, says Lawson, "is an excellent Artist at stealing young Pigs, which Prey he carries alive to his Nest, at which time the poor Pig makes such a Noise overhead, that Strangers that have heard them cry, and not seen the Bird and his Prey, have thought there were flying Sows and Pigs in that Country."

The Screech Owl

Dr. Brickell's professional bias is evident in his emphasis upon the medicinal properties of animals. Of the screech owls he writes: "The Flesh of these Birds is eaten by the *Indians* and *Negroes*. It is accounted good in Palsies and Melancholly. The Grease and Gall is good against Spots in the Eyes, and to strengthen the Eye-sight. The whole Bird, not plucked, calcined, and taken into the Throat, opens the Imposthumes of the Quinsie to a wonder, and the Brain, eaten, helps the Head-ach." The curative powers of the screech owl, however, are rivaled by those of the wild pigeon: "The Blood helps disorders in the Eyes; the Coats of the Stomach in Powder, cures bloody Fluxes. The Dung is the hottest of all Fowls, and is wonderful attractive, yet accompanied with an Anodyne force, but helps Head-ach, Megrim, pains in the Side and Stomach, pleurisy, Cholick, Lethargy, and many other Disorders" (*ibid.*, p. 187). O forefathers of Anacin and B. C. Powder!

Turkeys (p. 149)

Lawson gets his turkeys mixed with the water birds: "The wild Turkies I should have spoken of when I treated of the Land-Fowl." He gives some curious details: "The Eggs taken from the Nest, and hatch'd under a Hen, will yet retain a wild Nature, and commonly leave you, and run wild at last, and will never be got into a House to roost, but always perch on some high Tree, hard-by the House, and separate themselves from the tame sort, although (at the same time) they tread and breed together. I have been inform'd, that if you take these wild Eggs, when just on the point of being hatch'd, and dip them (for some small time) in a Bowl of Milk-warm Water, it will take off their wild Nature, and make them as tame and domestick as the others." Brickell (p. 182) specifies "Bowl of Milk, or warm Water."



Devil Fish (p. 154)

"The Divel-Fish lies at some of our Inlets, and, as near as I can describe him, is shap'd like a Scate, or Stingray: only has on his Head a Pair of very thick strong Horns, and is of a monstrous Size, and Strength, for this Fish has been known to weigh a Sloop's Anchor, and bring her back, against Tide, to almost the same Place."

Toad Fish

Brickell (p. 158) succinctly states: "Toad-Fish are nothing but a Skin full of Prickles, and few Bones; they are as ugly as a Toad, and preserv'd to look upon, and good for nothing else."

Whales

"Some *Indians* in America," wrote Lawson, "will go out to Sea, and get upon a Whales Back, and peg or plug up his Spouts, and so kill him" (p. 154). Borrowing this statement, Brickell adds, "which I can scarce believe, except they have some secret Spell to make them stupid, to treat them after that Manner" (221). "These Monsters," declared Dr. Brickell, "are very numerous on the Coasts of North Carolina, and the Bones and Oil would be a great Advantage to the Inhabitants that live on the Sand-Banks along the Ocean, if they were as dexterous and industrious in Fishing for them as they are Northwards; but as I have observed before, the People in these parts are not very much given to Industry, but wait upon Providence to throw these dead Monsters on Shoar, which frequently happens to their great Advantage and Profit."

Dr. Brickell gives (p. 217) some interesting data about the anatomy and the love life of whales: "The Yard is a strong Sinew, and from six to eight Feet long, and where the Yard is fixed, the Skin is doubled, so that it lies like a knife in a Sheath. The *Pudenda* of the Female is shaped like that of a large four footed Beast. They have Breasts, with Nipples at the side of it, like those of a Cow. When they couple together, they stand upright, with their Heads out of the Water, but how long they carry their Young, is uncertain."

An interesting feature of both Lawson's and Brickell's natural histories of North Carolina is the copperplate illustrations, chiefly of the animals of the region. Those in Lawson's, though often crude and grotesque in some details, do look like something Lawson had verbally described and the illustrator had tried faithfully to reproduce. Those in Dr. Brickell's seem to be at a further remove from actuality. Some of them, for example that of the benevolent-looking "tyger," remind me of animals in early-American "primitives." There is some resemblance,

too, between Dr. Brickell's tyger and William Blake's engraving of "The Tyger" in *Songs of Experience*, published fifty-seven years after *The Natural History of North-Carolina*. Blake had never seen a tiger. Neither had Dr. Brickell, in America. Of the animals in text and illustrations, this might be said by way of conclusion to this paper:

John Lawson first saw the critters, sharp and clean.
Then Doctor Brickell cribbed 'em and fubbed 'em.
The artist drew what Brickell through Lawson had seen.
All three at times went haywire when they dubbed 'em.

CORRECTION

In his review of Louise Cowan's *The Fugitive Group* in the Spring 1960 issue of the *Mississippi Quarterly*, John M. Bradbury wrote:

Written in its original form as a thesis project under Donald Davidson as Vanderbilt University, *The Fugitive Group* has all the advantages, and many of the disadvantages, of an inside job.

Mr. Bradbury has since learned that Mr. Davidson had no part in the direction of Mrs. Cowan's thesis, and wishes to apologize for the error, which arose from misinformation or misunderstanding.

The Editor

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